# RHYTHM AND METRE

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*February*, 1929.

# I

## INTRODUCTION.

"RHYTHM" is one of those accommodating terms which most people profess to understand but few care to define. It is not surprising therefore if "plain blunt men" begin to look askance on a subject so vague; especially when one remembers all the esoteric connections that the word has acquired in recent years. From afar we hear strange voices telling of the rhythms of Life (with a capital L), of the soul in a supersensual domain, of the eternal masculine and feminine; while close at hand lies the arena of the prosodists where the dust of combat is always thick enough to obscure the issue. One may be pardoned if he feels as little inclination for the dusty fray as for the headlong dive through space.

The first difficulty is that there are so many manifestations of rhythm: visible movements of all kinds—of waves and branches, of machines and animals (including those of the human body): recurrent phenomena such as tides, seasons, and phases of the moon: periodic changes in the development of an organism or in the history of a race: periodic distribution and grouping of sounds—mechanical sounds, the calls of birds and animals, all forms of music and speech.

The field is so extensive, the material so varied, that most of us could be regarded as students of rhythm in one way or another. We are aware of recurrent phenomena and almost without thinking of the matter we attempt to find some law underlying their distribution. Even if the name "student" be more strictly applied, the subject still affords scope for a variety of workers—psychologists, musicians, physicists, grammarians and physiologists. Each cultivates his favourite acre with such enthusiasm that too

often he is in danger of forgetting the work of others, and the general advance is impeded by needless confusion and misunderstanding.

Despite this the study still exercises a fascination over certain types of mind ; though at first sight one may marvel that anything so remote from the pressing needs of everyday should have power to enlist the passions and transform the quiet scholar into a violent partisan. The very remoteness is part of the charm for this is a study which, while it gives free play to the mind, does not involve any serious issues. Our conclusions on the matter—if we get so far—do not affect the practical business of life, and more important still, this is a realm of speculation which seems to be peculiarly easy of approach. We are endowed by nature with a sense of rhythm and we readily assume ourselves competent to pass judgment on any theory which may be submitted. Other fields of speculation, advanced mathematics for example, can be entered only by way of an elaborate symbolism, but this is one for which no special training is required, a mystery to which all men possess the key.

No part-truth could be more misleading. Men are no more equal in this respect than in physical appearance or intellectual attainment. Some of us respond much more readily than others, some are affected by one medium more than another, and even those who respond most easily put different interpretations upon the same sense-impressions. Throughout the discussion therefore we are confronted by two variable quantities—the diverse material which produces the sensation and the sentient being who perceives order therein, the objective and the subjective facts respectively.

On the objective side there is no great difficulty. Science, with the help of accurate instruments, can discover the properties and relationships of the physical stimuli. Larger rhythms like those of the stars and tides are almost

wholly objective, for the cycle of movement is so protracted that the recurrences do not coalesce to form groups presented in a single moment of consciousness. We know that the movements are cyclic but we do not feel the order as in language, music or dancing—the manifestations with which this book is principally concerned. In those arts the stream of impressions is so much more rapid that the two orders of fact are superimposed. Objective and subjective variations are interwoven and the final experience is determined partly by the stimuli and partly by the recipient and percipient powers of the individual.

I have chosen to lay stress upon the subjective element because that aspect of the study has been commonly neglected except by the psychologists, and also because it opens up for the prosodist and musical theorist a new field of enquiry—not new indeed in the sense that it is discovered for the first time but that it is still unfamiliar. My aim therefore is to bring English prosody into closer contact with the wider study of which it is a part.

Viewed from this angle verse is but a special type of prose, the rhythms of language itself are linked up with those of music, and the history of both takes on a new meaning when considered in relation to the development of the rhythmical sense. Thus, for example, we may attempt to explain scientifically, and not merely record, the rise and decay of poetic metres : the poverty of post-Chaucerian verse, the Elizabethan outburst, and the staid formality of the eighteenth century. Special metres like blank verse are seen to have their counterpart in music, and changes such as that from polyphony to harmony are brought within the province of the psychologist and the metrist.

A better understanding of subjective processes brings out also the importance of the spoken word ; for it would appear that although poets have borrowed much in the way

of pattern from outside sources, yet in the actual speaking of verse certain rhythmical sequences persist and reappear with such frequency as to become characteristic of the language and even of the individual. In other words, there is a rhythmical idiom and we may find in the survival of racial forms a link which establishes the continuity of English prosody from the Beowulf to the present day: or, going further afield, we may consider how bodily movement, influenced by normal occupations and geographical position, assists in producing those racial and individual habits.

And, finally, this line of approach gives a basis for comparison, so that one can classify metres from the least to the most "free" and make a clear distinction between verse and prose-form.

## II

## SOUND-RHYTHMS.

A STREAM of sensations distributed in such a way that they set up in the mind a more or less regular pulsation is said to be rhythmically arranged.[1] The employment of the word rhythm implies that an ordered sequence or progression is felt. Whether the sense affected is hearing, sight, touch or another, there is present this feeling of controlled movement, of form in the living state, unfolding itself gradually to the mind. It may be physical movement felt in the muscles of the limbs or of the speech organs, movement seen in space, or that progression in time which we experience in language and music, but always some order *en train de devenir*. The series of dots . . . . . given as the simplest spatial form does not become rhythmical until the eye or the hand travels to each one in succession, and when we speak of a *flowing* line a similar sense of movement is implied. Separate sensations are connected in the mind, grouped so that some relationship is established between the parts, and the resultant form is rhythmical only by virtue of this connection.

In dealing with sound-rhythms it is particularly necessary to emphasise continuity, because the study and description of the experience involves analysis and the great disadvantage of analytical systems is that they concern themselves with the trees rather than the wood. Students of music too often think of bars, prosodists fix their attention

[1] An accurate, though somewhat cumbrous definition, is given by Dr. Sonnenschein: "Rhythm is that property of a sequence of events in time which produces on the mind of the observer the impression of proportion between the durations of the several events or groups of events of which the sequence is composed."

—*What is Rhythm?* (1925), p. 16.

on feet or time-periods and forget that such systems are no more than convenient instruments by the aid of which artist and scientist try to measure rhythmic progression and translate it into written characters. The pulsations of rhythmical sound, like waves on still water, move forward by imperceptible changes, one passing into another by insensible gradations. The motion once established, who shall say where the wave begins or ends ?

Let the continuity be forgotten however, and it is easy to slip into that tiresome discussion as to the exact position of the dividing lines. Very soon we come to believe that such lines are essential to the rhythm and not merely to the analysis. " Musical rhythmics is the art of establishing due proportion between sound movement and static silence, of opposing them and of preparing for one by means of the other according to the laws of contrast and balance on which all style depends."[2] The writer might well have included speech-rhythms. Units of accent, quantity, pitch, belong only to our scales of measurement.

The major divisions of form, from the phrase to the " movement " in music, from line to stanza and paragraph in verse, are scarcely ever in doubt. In the conventional forms of both arts such divisions are indicated by familiar devices, rimes, harmonic resolutions and the like ; but in general, as the stream of sensations unfolds itself, the mind arranges the sounds in sense-groups. Obviously this is true of speech-sounds, but it is not quite so evident in music. Yet there also, phrasing is determined by sense and not by bars ; mere counting of the time is not enough. Even nonsense-syllables may produce intelligible combinations. However meaningless the separate elements may be, the

[2] *Rhythm, Music and Education*, by Emile Jacques Dalcroze (trans. Rubenstein, 1921), p. 113.

proportions and harmonious relationships within the group are felt to be fundamentally true and satisfying.

Too little attention has been given to natural rhythmical divisions, which are limited on one hand by the span of attention and on the other by conditions of sound-production. By most people, rhythm within those limits is felt rather than clearly perceived. The relationships are not necessarily explicit. Individual experiences may differ considerably, and it would seem, indeed, that the precise method of sub-dividing natural groups or phrases is largely a matter of habit and convenience.

Physical science has been called in to assist us in arriving at definite facts but the physical properties of the sounds can explain very little. We are concerned with the experience rather than the cause of it ; and not only does the mind impose on the sound-sequence a regularity which is not found in the physical stimuli, but a sequence may be interpreted in various ways by different hearers, or even by the same person at different times. In the latter case it might be objected that two renderings of a phrase cannot be exactly alike. True, but let the sounds be produced mechanically and with scientific accuracy, and there is still no certainty that they will be heard in the same way. The mind will tolerate neither monotony on one hand, nor lack of order on the other : irregularities are minimised and excessive regularity is diversified.

For the most part, divergences of opinion as to the minor groups within the phrase are due to differences either in the direction of attention or in the development of the sense of rhythm. For example, people who agree to call Tennyson a master of word-music may disagree violently on the question of foot-division, but others fail to discover any rhythmical outline in certain passages of Bridges and Thomas Hardy, or in phrases of Scriabin and Cyril Scott.

It is scarcely necessary to show at length that direction of attention affects the grouping of sounds. The clock pendulum, beating to "tick-tock" or "tock-tick," has already done more than its duty by way of illustration, but we know, from experimental evidence, that hearers are divided roughly into "stressers" and "timers."[3] Presented with a series of like sounds occurring at equal intervals of time, one man convinces himself that the sounds differ in force or emphasis, another thinks that they vary in duration. But in the arts we are dealing with complex elements, sounds which do vary in loudness, in duration, in pitch, and in timbre. Any or all of those factors may take part in producing the rhythmical pulsations, and we may direct attention to one factor to the exclusion of the others.

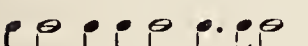
We know also that the amount of irregularity required to destroy all feeling of rhythm varies considerably with different people. For some, it is true, as Wundt suggested, that "no series of impressions is possible that cannot in some way be comprehended as rhythmic": but the possession of a subjective scale of time-measurement is rare, quite as rare, I believe, as the absolute ear for pitch. Judging from the great differences in clearness and persistence of our auditory images, one would expect rhythmical skill to depend ultimately on details of physiology. That, however, is a question for the pure scientist. Individual differences, from whatever source, concern us only in so far as they affect the experience. The two sets of difficulties are clearly not co-ordinate, but both must be kept in view if the study of rhythm is to advance.

The discovery of an adequate notation would do much to overcome the "attention" difficulty. Exisiting systems, which are either unwieldy or incomplete, may yet be replaced

[3] See *The Rhythm of Prose*, W. M. Patterson (1917).

by a simple rhythm-script, intelligible to timers and stressers alike. Unfortunately, we have still to determine the qualities which are essential to the description of a sound-rhythm. Prosodists, as a rule, have been content to describe in terms of one factor, indicating variations of intensity or duration alone ; and, indeed, we may quite well speak of a " rhythm of stresses," or of quantities, meaning that one factor varies according to some ordered scheme, but as a description, is not that incomplete ? All notations of a single " dimension " seem to suffer from the same defect.

To me, at least, a succession of time-values is without form and meaningless until some points rise into prominence and produce a recognisable outline. In grouping durations the mind discovers or supplies points of special importance which must be indicated in order to give shape to the sequence, and the form presented by a series of time-values varies according to the incidence of the ideal stress. *e.g.*

 may represent

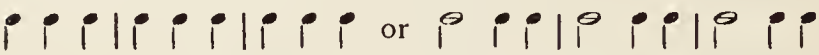
or

or some other arrangement.

Even when variations in pitch, intensity, and timbre are eliminated as far as possible, prominent points emerge to mark the crests of rhythmical waves. In practice the ideal stress is often accompanied by a change in the physical properties of the sound itself, but it need not be so distinguished, and certainly no single factor is responsible for the emphasis. The problem might be elucidated by a study of the mental processes involved in the recognition of familiar melodies when tapped out in monotone. From Dr. Bridges' experiment of beating out the syllables of the Lord's Prayer on a single note of the organ, I would conclude

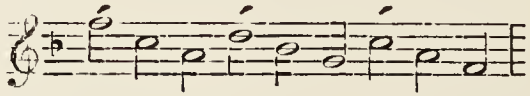
that the mind gradually succeeds in associating the necessary stresses with the time-values.[4]

A notation which gives degrees of stress alone is equally unsatisfactory, as it lends itself even more readily to misinterpretation. The writer may have in mind a perfectly clear experience when he describes a form as ′ × × | ′ × × | ′ × × but even if the time-periods are assumed to be equal, that may represent

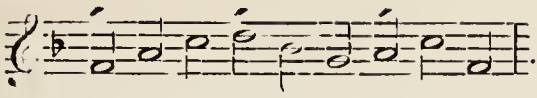


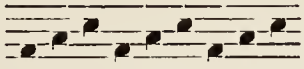
or some more elaborate, but equally possible outline like

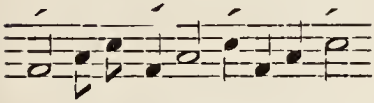
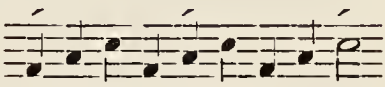
We cannot afford to ignore differences of that kind, since each rendering bears its own peculiar rhythmical character. One cannot conceive of a complete description of movement in time which makes no reference to time-values.

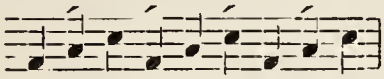
Pitch and timbre, however, are in a different category. Were the human ear insensible to all variations of pitch and timbre, there would still remain to us such delight as is derived from rhythm alone. The addition of pitch-variation to rhythmical progression produces " melody " in music and language, but the rhythm itself is a thing apart. That does not mean that the factors in question may not be of some importance in a given instance. Pitch sequences are frequently used to bring out the rhythmic structure, emphasising it either by parallel or contrary motion, so to speak, *e.g.*, the form may appear as  or

[4] See *Letter to a Musician on English Prosody*, by Robert Bridges in " Musical Antiquary," Oct., 1909.

 . But pitch alone gives no indication of rhythm.

The series  may take various forms :

 or 

or  Timbre and pitch then, play the part of powerful allies, worthy of recognition on particular occasions. It may well be that some verse has been constructed on a melodic basis, but we need not, on that account, confuse rhythm and melody.

The rhythmical outline, as I understand it, is fixed therefore, by the relative importance and distribution in time of various degrees of ideal stress. The possibility of misunderstandings arising from the direction of attention is reduced to a minimum when both factors are clearly defined.

Difficulties of the second type spring from our inability to find order in variety, to overcome irregularities. I am not avoiding the point by describing the pulsations as " more or less regular " : each hearer must determine for himself how far his sense of rhythm will carry him. The most fervent admirer of the " less regular " forms can scarcely say more than that the waves establish simple proportions in time. Certainly many natural rhythms, especially those connected with movements of the human body, tend towards perfect regularity, and it seems fitting to begin from that type in theory.

The belief, still fairly common, that all rhythm is the sub-division of the time-stream into equal periods, is

definitely misleading. Spontaneous rhythmic forms, designed only to express emotion and uninfluenced by self-conscious systems, do not exhibit this uniformity of division, nor do the periods seem to be equal. Folk-music, for example, frequently uses unequal bars, and in remote districts the untutored musician or singer will often depart from the equal periods in rendering our barred music. The departure is seldom due to a defective sense of rhythm, but indicates rather the triumph of natural rhythms over more limited and less expressive conventional forms. In the cadences of the orator, too, unequal periods abound.

Insistence on the ratio of equality arises, in music and language alike, from the metrical treatment of sounds. When, in addition to the enjoyment of rhythm as a sensation and means of direct expression through the senses, we aim at securing intellectual delight from the immediate perception of form, it becomes necessary to emphasise the appearance of design in the arrangement of sounds, to measure the rhythmic progression by some recurring stress-time unit. That, of course, is but another way of saying that metre is one special type of rhythm, distinguished from other types by the presence of a repeating unit or pattern of units.

Natural rhythms have to be simplified for the purpose of metrical expression, for in order to conform to an outline the recurrence of which is definitely anticipated, the spoken sounds must be selected and arranged with some care. The nature of our language with its marked speech-accent (increased force of sound) has directed attention to the alternation of accented and unaccented elements, has emphasised the fact that waves are made up of alternate crests and troughs ; hence the tendency to simplify by regulating the number of stressed and unstressed syllables,

and their position with relation to each other. In their metres the Greeks, and the Romans also, chose to simplify by fixing the relative duration of syllables. Some such process is necessary in all cases.

The measuring scale adopted in music differs from those of verse, yet fundamentally the two systems serve much the same purpose. Each art, however, has kept its own terminology. We speak of "mensural" music, but "metrical" language. Simplification takes place in both arts. Music, although it displays an alternation of crest and trough, has preferred to regulate the distance between one crest and the next following, and to sub-divide that distance according to a uniform scheme. Since musical notes, unlike syllables, have no recognised value outside of the art, the desire for ensemble performance necessitated the discovery of a more rigid time-unit. At first, the incidence of stress was determined, as it still is in verse, by the speech-accent of the words to be sung. In the later development of the notation fixed points of strong and medium stress were associated with the bar, which thus became a stress-time unit. This scale of measurement, in which bars are supposed to be of equal duration, is a convenience adopted almost universally in the later examples of western music, but it is worth noting that a similar result might have been obtained by a different system, another method of simplification. Frequently, of course, musical rhythms coincide with the bar-system, but such rigidity is certainly not essential to the maintenance of an ordered sequence. The common practice of reducing a whole composition under a single time-signature has its disadvantages. As a rule, the music of primitive peoples cannot be represented by this conventional scale, and time and again our composers have rebelled against the "tyranny of the bar-line."

Wagner went so far as to call rhythm "an intruder in the realm of absolute music."[5] A passage in his *Beethoven* however, suggests that it is not rhythm so much as the equal-bar convention which Wagner attacks. As translated by Dannreuther, the passage reads: "By means of the rhythmical arrangement of his tones the musician touches upon the perceptible plastic world; that is to say, he does so by virtue of the similarity of the laws through which the movement of visible bodies is intelligible to our perception. Human gestures, which in the dance *are rendered intelligible by expressive and regularly alternating movement*, appear to serve music in a manner akin to that in which bodies serve light, which would not shine unless it could break against them; similarly it may be said that without rhythm music would not be perceptible."[6]

The writer has here in mind the regularly alternating rhythm of the dance. I have added the italics to draw attention to his assumption that this regularity arises from a desire for intelligible form. We need not seek far for proof that poets and musicians have found isochronous measures to be an irksome limitation. The latter, of course, have more cause for complaint, for the poet may more easily disregard the simplified measurement of time and obtain a variety of effects from a form that is not clearly understood by the reader.

Some emotions, particularly feelings of self-expansion and those connected with the lyrical mood find expression in a regular see-saw movement, but even then, isochronism has no objective reality. Mechanical regularity is scarcely possible, even if it were desirable. Yet in spite of M. Verrier's warning, some of the advocates and many of the

5 Discussed in *Music and Action*, by J. Donovan. (1889).

6 *Beethoven*, by R. Wagner, trans. by E. Dannreuther. (1893), p. 27.

opponents of isochronism still assume that the sound-material within the periods is actually produced in equal spaces of time. The prosodist, who may have occasion to use musical symbols, is hampered by this metronomic conception of music. With the exception of certain dances, there is nothing in the arts to support such a view.

This is not the place to treat of metrical systems in detail ; but the discussion is relevant in so far as it emphasises that rhythms are more or less intelligible in proportion to our skill in apprehending order and design. The easiest form to grasp is that in which not only are the time-periods equal, but in each period the number and distribution of the sounds is the same. As the sense of rhythm develops there is less need for those extreme degrees of simplification. Metrical patterns, however, are composed of just such idealised units, and hence the insistence on isochronism, isosyllabism, and the other " isms."

## III

# THE REPRESENTATION OF SPEECH-RHYTHM.

ALTHOUTH it has been customary to regard speech as the business of the grammarian rather than the musician, there is no necessity, so far as rhythm is concerned, to discriminate between syllables and tones: the nature of the experience itself does not alter with the change of sound-material. The existence of any fundamental difference between the rhythms of speech and those of other sounds has never been proved, nor does it seem possible to point out a distinguishing feature of vital importance. Speech, however, has been set aside for special treatment because of its melodic character, its marked difference of prevailing tempo, and its appearance on the printed page.

As compared with music, language presents a more rapid succession of waves, and on the whole, has more variety in its rate of progression. Its range of tempi is not greater, but the tempo is constantly changing. The melody too, proceeds by gradations of pitch much smaller and less clearly defined than those of the diatonic scales, so that altogether speech is more flexible, more complicated in its phonetic structure, and for that reason more difficult to analyse. Those, however, are not vital differences. Already there are signs that music will not long be content with a few limited scales nor be bound by a rigid bar-system. In rhythm and melody recent music is approximating more and more to the freedom of prose.

Then there is the question of conventional script. The lack of resemblance between a page of printing and a musical score serves to accentuate melodic differences, and what is more important, leads us to think of tones and

syllables in terms of different units. The line and the phrase in literature stand out by reason of the meaning of words and their arrangement in stanza and paragraph ; music, with its continuous stave marked off in equal measures appears to be made up of bars. The underlying similarity might be clearer if, as in free-verse, musical phrases were printed in separate lines.

As a result of those differences speech-rhythm presents its own problems, of which not the least important is the uncertainty of interpretation. The ancient scop or minstrel reciting his tales in the wine-hall communicated the spoken word directly to his audience, but to-day we are forced to reconstruct the sounds from written symbols. We are all "players of voluntaries, exhibiting by ear," and we give to the syllables the emphasis and duration which seems to us most natural. But even among cultivated readers, personal preferences and individual speech-habits lead to divergences, slight in themselves but powerful in their cumulative effect. Normal accent and a rough distinction between shorter and longer syllables are our only indications of the rhythm felt by the writer.

In the present discussion the word "accent" is used for the objective quality, the degree of emphasis (loudness or clear articulation) given to the spoken sound, and where no further qualification is added, it means the chief emphasis in a group of syllables. In the vast majority of English words the position of this accent is fixed, but since emphasised syllables are not all of equal strength, considerable freedom is allowed in the gradation of accents for the purpose of rhythmical combination. The shade of meaning to be conveyed by the words usually determines the gradation, but various readings may still be possible when there is no question of semantic values. *e.g.* We may read :

" Whérefore dóth your róut send fórth a jóyous shóut ? "
or " Whérefore dòth your róut send fórth a jòyous shóut ? "

" Óne more unfórtunate " Ône more unfórtunate
or
Wéary of bréath." Wèary of bréath."

On the whole however, the accent of English syllables is much less variable than their duration. That some sounds are definitely longer than others, we know ; but who is to say how much longer they are ? The relative duration of long to short will depend on the rhythmical outline we happen to have in mind. Provided there is no undue distortion, no transposition of shorter and longer syllables, we are at liberty to mould the phrases to our own natural rhythms.

Yet, after we have satisfied ourselves as to what the writer intended, there remains the notation-difficulty mentioned above. With speech-sounds it is especially important to find some means of indicating precisely what we think we hear. Some people feel that syllables cluster around the stresses, the weaker attaching themselves to the stronger. Such hearers describe by giving the order in which the elements combine. The presence of the ictus toward the beginning or the end of a cluster determines whether the wave is of falling or rising movement. Others again, as a result of habit or training, consider each stress, each wave-crest, as marking the beginning of a new " period " of time.

Each system has advantages, but on the whole, the latter seems preferable as a measuring-scale. The precise point of minimum stress in the trough of a wave is often in doubt and it is obviously convenient to measure from a well-defined

point. Besides that, there is some analogy between rhythmical grouping and the division of language itself into syllables. Dr. Sonnenschein's work on the subject is worthy of special notice. His conclusion is that "the effective part of a syllable from the psychological point of view is its vowel-sound and any consonant sound or sounds that may follow this vowel-sound within the syllable."[7] The mind tends to measure from the effective point, which, in the present instance is the rhythmical stress.

Musical notation recognises the tendency: it also gives some clue to both time and stress, and since it has the initial advantage of being in common use, it is readily intelligible to a certain number of readers. The system is a convention, of course, and no extravagant claims need be made for it. Its chief defects are those already mentioned, *viz.*, insistence on strict isochronism and the theoretical coincidence of accent and stress. Because of the variations in the tempo of speech no absolute time-values can be given to notes and some may consider that to be a further objection, but to those who can follow musical script with ease, crotchets and quavers may be of great assistance.

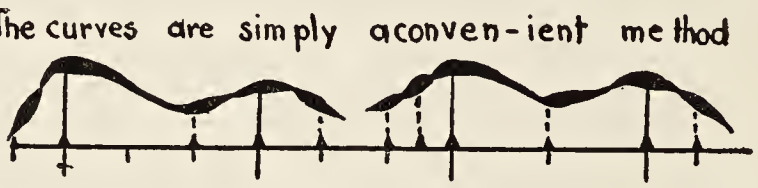
For the sake of other readers some kind of "graph" must be devised, but that again has the disadvantage of being unwieldy. I do not know of any perfect system, and certainly the curves given here are not intended as an attempt to establish a new method. They are the least unsatisfactory means I can discover to represent my experience to those who are not conversant with musical values.[8]

An example of the graphical system may be useful here. If the reader will consider a sentence like: "The cúrves

[7] Op. cit., p. 124.

[8] M. Verrier illustrates by a graph at the beginning of his *Essai sur les principes de la metrique anglaise.* (1909–10).

are simply a convénient méthod"—he may find that the four accents are separated by intervals of time which are felt to be equal. That is not necessarily the only rendering but it is one possibility. In the graph of that reading each syllable is indicated by a thickening of the line, upward and downward curves show increase and decrease of accent, and time-values are plotted on the horizontal scale below.




The time of the first wave (between the crests) is divided into $\frac{2}{3} + \frac{1}{3}$, the second is approximately $\frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{6} + \frac{1}{6}$, the third is $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2}$. In the same way changes of tempo can be shown by varying the spaces between wave-crests, and we may proceed to graph whole pages of prose provided our experience is sufficiently clear to let us analyse the relationships. Accuracy of analysis matters little in this example, but for the subsequent discussion it is essential to have some such means of representing ordinary speech-values.

From one point-of-view the rhythm of every-day speech is the simplest form in language, from another it is the most complicated. Its simplicity lies on the subjective side, for no demand is made on the ear (or the mind) in the way of analysis and the effect is little more than the spontaneous reaction to the sounds. Frequently, in conversation, one derives a vague feeling of pleasure from a well-turned, shapely sentence, apart altogether from the thought expressed or the quality of the speaker's voice, and without any real perception of form. In the literary form called prose, relationship between the parts is a little more evident.

Still, for most people, the rhythm of good prose lies in a balance or ordered arrangement of phrase and clause, a grouping of waves into larger rhythms rather than any similarity in outline or connection in time between the individual waves.

The examination of a few sentences will avoid much tedious explanation. Take the following passage from a modern essay, H. J. Massingham's *A Golden Age*.

> "What a crowd of deserters had climbed upon Mendip walls and sunned themselves in the golden weather! They had got to a common bedrock, an exiguous pilgrim's ration of bread and water was much the same for all, and together they had to solve how to draw the bounty and bide the pelting of the elements. And except in the warmth of the villages, they had all solved the matter in the same way, by going small and living small."

We are immediately aware of pauses breaking up the sentences into breath-groups, syntactical units, or sections of rhythm. Their exact nature scarcely concerns us since we are dealing with the phenomenon and not the cause, but it is well to distinguish between stops of measured duration and those which are indefinite (the sign for the latter being //).

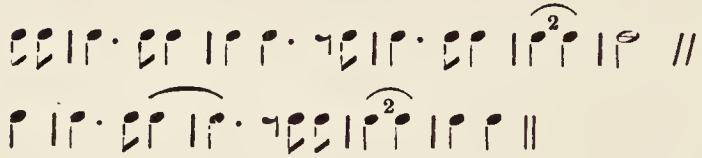
To me the first sentence is divided thus :

> What a crówd of desérters : had clímbed upon Méndip wálls // and súnned themsèlves in the gólden wéather.

Three groups steadily increasing in length (consisting of 2, 3 and 4 waves respectively) may give an impression of rhythmical order sufficient to satisfy our sense of form, but further analysis brings out the similarity in the waves.

Those who regard "irregularity of rhythmic impulse as the distinctive mark of good prose" will find the movement too regular.[9] The outline is :

or



The pause after "for all" divides the second sentence into two major groups, each balanced in form but showing different types of balance.

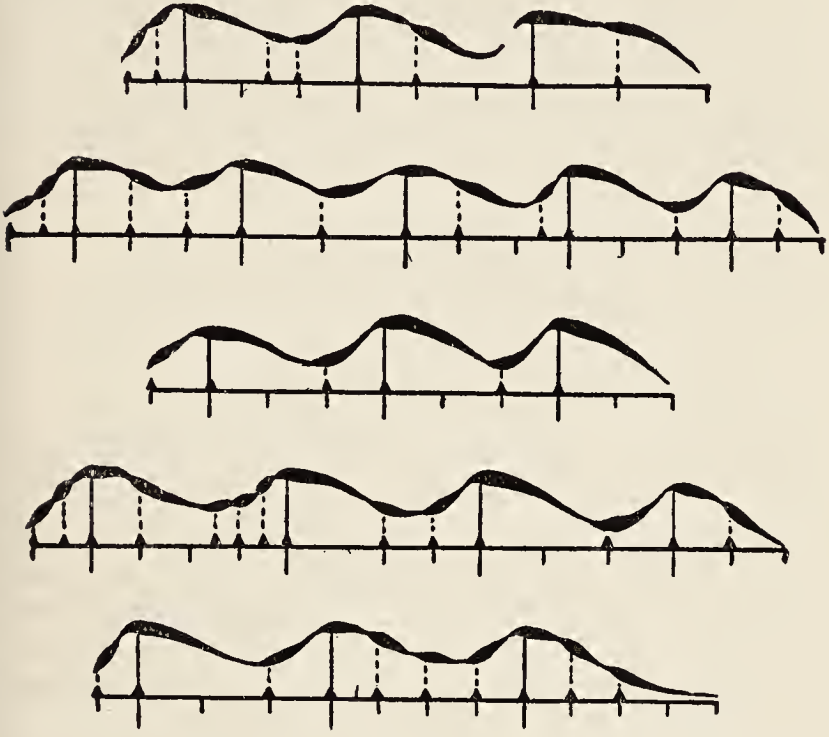
> "They had got to a common bedrock // an exiguous pilgrim's ration of bread and water // was much the same for all // and together they had to solve how to draw the bounty : and bide the pelting of the elements."

Before that pause the structure is symmetrical, a longer group of five waves being flanked by shorter sections of three waves each : and the second half of the sentence illustrates a type of balance which is very common in sound rhythms, *viz.*, a group of four followed by a similar group of which the final wave is represented by a silence or an extension, thus giving additional emphasis to the third

[9] See *English Metrists, 18th and 19th Cent.* T. S. Omond. (1907), p. 61.

of the series. We are familiar with this grouping in ballad metre and in a great deal of popular music.

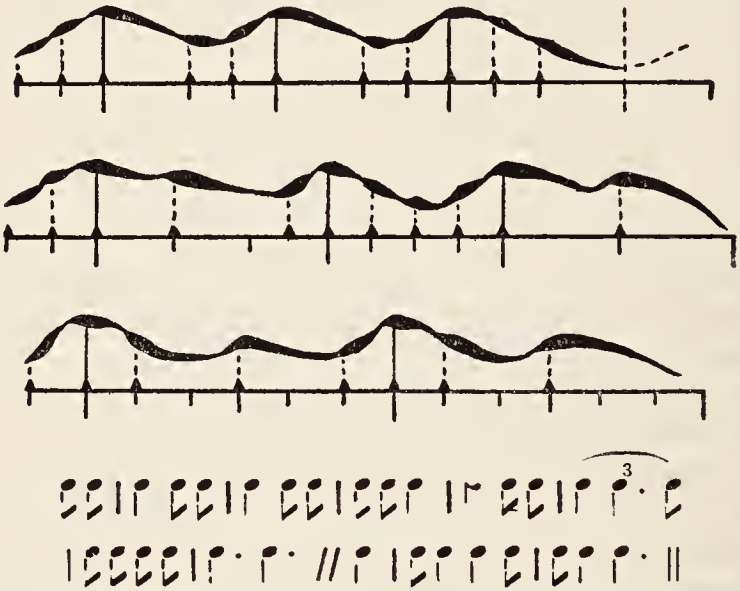
Detailed analysis brings out the fluctuation between duple and triple movement.



The third sentence has a more subtle rhythm, but in general structure it is the reverse of sentence 1.

"And except in the warmth of the villages : they had all solved the matter in the same way // by going small and living small."

The first phrase including the pause after "villages" makes a section of four parts. Then comes a three-wave group of which the 1st and 3rd are of increased duration and accent ; and the final phrase falls into two compound waves of still greater length. As the number of waves per section is reduced the whole form is stabilised by progressive lengthening of the "period."



Although no conclusion can be drawn from the examination of a few sentences, the analysis may serve to exemplify general principles which are required for the study of verse. In particular, the free interchange of different types of rhythmical movement is to be noted. All three sentences show the mingling of common and triple time-divisions, a device with which everyone is familiar, in practice if

not in theory. Most readers will feel the change of movement in words like "Mendip," "bedrock," "pilgrim's," but as an exercise in recognising the transition it is more profitable to consider "solve how to draw the bounty" and "bide the pelting of the elements": or again, we may contrast the prevailing wave-form in the first and third phrases of sentence 3.

The general balance and symmetry which underlies the apparent freedom is also illustrated. Indeed, the constant fluctuation between various forms of time-division is the necessary outcome of our instinctive obedience to the laws of rhythm. In most of our everyday speech there is no trace of conscious arrangement, but we cannot escape the natural tendency to group syllables in what we find to be the most convenient and pleasing relationships.

The ease with which we adjust an infinite variety of sound-material to a few familiar outlines is astonishing. Only when we encounter speakers whose natural rhythms differ markedly from our own do we realise that the sounds may be grouped otherwise, that the difference in speech between individuals, communities and races, is not merely a matter of pronunciation or of pitch. The further problem of how far the natural rhythms are inherited from the race and how far acquired by the individual may have important bearing on literature (and on philology, as Sievers shows in his Rhythmisch-melodische Studien), but the discussion would lead us too far afield at the moment. My immediate purpose is to attach a definite meaning to the term "speech-form" and demonstrate the practical workings of a graphical system.

# IV

# THE PATTERN OF VERSE.

## § 1

SO far as form alone is concerned verse and prose differ chiefly in the extent to which rhythmical structure is made evident : verse being distinguished by the immediate appearance of an ideal pattern. The speech-sounds are so arranged that the hearer is at once aware of some plan in the poet's mind, some scheme of proportion governing the disposition of the words. Rhythm no longer fulfils a humble ancillary function, subordinate to meaning and constantly adjusting itself to rules of grammar and syntax, but becomes itself, a necessary portion of the complete meaning. The grouping of syllables and lines reveals an organic structure, to which, if need be, the other values of language must conform. There is, of course, no such thing as complete freedom of choice in the matter of verse-pattern, because semantic and grammatical relationships are preserved in all good verse. But their preservation is no longer essential. Nonsense-lines are satisfactory as far as they go, and the first stanza of Keats' *Autumn* is none the less verse because the sentence is unfinished. Meaning is the first consideration in prose ; the embodiment of an ideal order and harmony, despite the limitations of language, is the fundamental principle of verse.

The mere existence of such a pattern is not sufficient, for it might be argued that behind the most casual utterance of everyday speech there lies an " original or model proposed for imitation," some convenient mould inherited with the mother-tongue. Nor is it sufficient to say that conscious design is discoverable. The rhythms of Pater, when analysed, may give abundant evidence of conscious design,

but the form remains prose so long as, in the reading, the proportions of the scheme do not force themselves on our attention. When that happens we hover between prose and verse. The dithyrambic passages of Lorna Doone are glaring examples. The reader is troubled, not only by the resemblance between Blackmore's phrases, but by their likeness to blank verse. In Ruskin and Browne, too, one frequently comes upon verse-passages masquerading as prose.

Verse then aims at making conscious design immediately perceptible. If the reader is unaware of that ordered structure, then for him the verse-form does not exist.

Pattern, however, does not necessarily mean "repetition." As a rule the ideal scheme is made evident by the metrical treatment of sound—*i.e.*, measurement by means of a repeating unit—but not all verse is metrical. The more irregular or "free" types are not dependent on simple repetition and yet the immediate perception of design marks them off as distinct from prose. H. D.'s poem, *The Islands*, is a good example of such verse—a form in which pattern is made clear without the anticipated recurrence of a fixed unit.

*e.g.* What are the islands to me
if you are lost,
what is Paros to me
if your eyes draw back,
What is Milos
if you take fright of beauty,
terrible, torturous, isolated,
a barren rock?

Turning to metrical verse, we notice at once that the structural unit may vary considerably in extent and in constitution. Some units, indeed, are but remotely connected

with the present subject, the verse being enriched by repetition of elements which are not essential factors of rhythm. The pattern which we are asked to follow is not, in the strict sense, a rhythmical design, but is added to that design. Instances are found in the semantic parallelism of Hebrew poetry and the elaborate alliterative schemes of some Welsh metres, and it is probable, though I do not know of a clear case, that pitch-sequence has also been used as the foundation of a unit.[10]

To realise how the unit may vary in length we need not go beyond our own verse. There are minor and major combinations of sounds, and anything from a syllable to a line or a stanza may be regarded as a single element for the purpose of repetition. Thomas Macdonagh declared that "Milton's and all good speech-verse is built up in sentences, not in lines or in fractions of lines. The metrical unit is the line—that is, the lines are equally long in time."[11]

It is unnecessary here to question his final statement, but from our own experience, most of us will agree that the line is frequently the effective unit in verse; that we apprehend the larger group as a whole and anticipate its return.

Such a unit consists of a group of waves, like the prose-phrase, but with the difference that its limits are not

[10] For information on Welsh poetry I am indebted to Mr. Saunders Lewis. The metres in question can be illustrated from the translations of Mr. T. Gwynn Jones. (*Welsh Outlook*, Vol. II, No. 22, p. 392), e.g.:

| | |
|---|---|
| "Night may dáre/not, my déarest, | (Scheme ntmdr/ntmdr st) |
| Shadow thrów/where she doth rést; | (sh d thr/r shd thr st) |
| Dáylight/round her will dálly, | (d l t / r d r l d l) |
| As sunshíne/on snow is shé. | (sn sh n/n sn sh) |

[11] *Thomas Campion and the Art of English Poetry*, by T. Macdonagh. (Dublin, 1912), p. 53.

necessarily determined by the sense. The end of the line is often indicated by some familiar device, a pause, a pitch variation or a rime-sound, and the structure proceeds by definite repetition of one or at most a small number of those groups. Music makes use of a similar group-unit when a simple theme is followed by variations heard immediately as different renderings of the same general pattern.

In the vast majority of verses, however, the waves which go to make the ideal pattern or "base" (to borrow a useful term form Professor Abercrombie) bear so much resemblance to each other that the line is measured by the return of the wave-unit, which, according to personal preference, we call a foot, period, measure or bar. There is no suggestion here that bar and foot are alternative names for the same thing. The point is that each denotes a complete wave,[12] and that, after all, is the commonest metrical unit by far.

The essential property of a unit in a pattern, either visual or auditory, is that it bears a perceptible resemblance to every other co-ordinate member, and in the present instance that similarity is to be discovered by a further analysis of the wave, by determining the stress and distribution of its parts. The repetitions of a metrical scheme are not to be compared with common units of measurement like the inches on a foot-rule, for similar things need not be identical. Thus in both music and language the tempo may vary without changing the nature of the pattern.

[12] In order to avoid preconceptions arising from systems of prosody, the word "wave" is here used for a complete rhythmical pulsation—diastole and systole—which we hear or seem to hear (not a sound-wave). The visual association with the word also helps to emphasise the continuity of rhythm.

The degree of resemblance between the waves will depend on the amount of detail which is common to all, and in units of verse-pattern just as in those of wall-paper ornament that is an extremely variable quantity. Railway coaches, in spite of external differences, are the units of which a train is composed : their resemblance to each other will be increased if all are sub-divided in the same way, and still more if the passengers are distributed equally in the compartments. So it is with verse-structure. Further detail, which makes for variety in the execution of the design, lies outside of the metrical scheme. The constant elements only are included in the base, and units will resemble each other more or less as those elements are many or few. One writer is content with a regular grouping of waves, in pairs for example, and nothing more ; a second feels that definite proportions exist between the waves in the group, and a third works to a scheme in which each unit has the same number of sounds distributed in the same way.

It would be absurd to suggest that the perception of such minute distinctions is necessary for the appreciation of literature. On the contrary, pre-occupation with metrical schemes hinders the enjoyment of poetry, and for that matter, detracts from the sensuous delight in verse-rhythm. Awareness of an ideal pattern must not be taken to mean the *analysis* of the pattern. The fact that units resemble each other is sufficient for reader and writer alike ; but the prosodist makes it his business to discover the exact nature of the relationship, and his analysis will be more or less detailed according to the degree of resemblance.

The ideal pattern, since it is the sine quâ non of verse, is the most fitting basis for the classification of verse-forms, and the common division of metres into alliterative, quantitative, syllabic and accentual may be regarded, in the first place at least, as descriptive of the "base." The

scientific study of rhythm however, demands some system which deals with facts of the same order, and preferably one which separates the classes without losing sight of the unity of verse as a whole. The varying amount of detail contained in the unit of pattern provides a ready means of classifying metres and at the same time directs attention to differences of degree rather than kind. Verse is thus regarded as a continuous series of closely related forms ranging from prose to isochronous measures. At one extreme the pattern is so faintly indicated as to be almost negligible, at the other a wave of definite outline is repeated with the utmost regularity. There are many intermediate stages, and boundaries are not clearly defined, but for practical purposes it will be sufficient to distinguish three classes, which, for reasons given below, I shall call (*a*) Variable, (*b*) Doubtful, (*c*) Fixed (Types I, II, and III).

The stage at which prose passes into verse of variable base must, of necessity, depend on the hearer's sense of rhythm. Many readers find that a great deal of "free-verse" earns its right to the title only by its disposition on the printed page. It is prose arranged according to the rhythmical phrasing, and the pattern is so elastic that the rhythms of ordinary speech can be employed with little or no alteration. Increased freedom of choice, it is claimed, makes possible a greater range of expression. With the majority of readers, however, the poet must rely on the pure sensation of rhythm: those who are aggressively rhythmic will measure by means of time-units as they do in prose, but most people fail to *hear* the lines as verse.

Definite perception of pattern gives a certain amount of intellectual pleasure and the anticipation of a unit, provided the repetition be not unduly prolonged, begets a more sensitive response to the actual sounds, because slight inequalities gain prominence by contrast with the

surrounding regularity. In ultra-free verse all this stimulation, both mental and physical, is sacrificed for a doubtful gain. The poems may be rich in other beauties, brilliant metaphor, arresting freshness of diction and the like, but so far as phonetic structure alone is concerned, it does not follow that an elaborate speech-rhythm vaguely felt is a more powerful means of expression than a simpler pattern clearly perceived. One may be permitted to question Mr. H. P. Collins' assertion that "the most successful rhythm is that of which neither author nor reader is conscious."[13] I take it that the word *verse*, as usually understood, means more than unconscious rhythm. The relationship between poetry and rhythm is another matter.

Non-metrical verse indeed, is not of vital importance here, but serves to show the transition between prose and metre.

§ 2

The variable base (Type I) may be studied in the alliterative verse of Old English. The name "alliterative metre," is not unfitting since alliteration does help to mark the return of the larger unit and to give the impression of deliberate order. Still, the device is by no means necessary to the rhythm as such; the outline could be preserved intact even if all alliteration were destroyed. Sounds of the same quality (or pitch-blend)[14] are used to draw attention to the base and to bind together the half-lines, but the pattern itself is of the simplest kind, being a succession of groups each made up of two waves. The hearer is not led to anticipate anything beyond the pairs of stresses.

[13] *Modern Poetry*, by H. P. Collins. p. 186.

[14] Dr. H. J. Watt in his *Psychology of Sound* (1917), raised strong objection to the use of "quality" in this sense.

There is no fixed number of syllables, the position of stresses in the line may vary, and the time-distribution is unforeseen. Thus, the outline of the wave being variable, speech-rhythms require little modification.

Old English verse, therefore, is comparatively "free" in structure, much nearer to prose than are the regular metres of succeeding centuries; and its freedom is to be explained partly by the accentual system of Teutonic speech. M. Verrier points out that in some languages such as French accent can be displaced quite freely to suit the rhythm, in others, like German, it can scarcely ever be displaced.[15] The fact that speech-accent was less variable in Old English than in modern helps to account for the simplicity of verse-pattern, especially when one remembers that a literature perpetuated chiefly by oral tradition must have been accompanied by a good deal of rapid extempore composition. Yet, in itself, that explanation is hardly sufficient. It would be nearer the truth to say that the whole structure of Old English poetry bears the marks of a primitive type, if one may make such a statement without implying that this kind of verse is inferior to another in artistic value.

The early poet gained his effects through the *feeling* for rhythm rather than the perception of metrical pattern, and to judge from the growth of the rhythmical sense in childhood that seems to be the first stage in the normal course of development. Later poets, exploring all possibilities of the variable base, using more elaborate speech-forms and crowding extra syllables within the compass of a wave, may have brought about artistic disaster and caused the decay of the metre, but their efforts are the natural result of the process of growth. Advancing on one line, they reached a point where the sense of rhythm could no

[15] Op. cit., p. 61, 88.

longer keep pace with the growing complexity of form and the simple scheme disappeared altogether.

At first sight this view may seem to conflict with the results of modern research, for the principles of Old English metre, as set forth by philological scholars, suggest the elaborate technique of a highly-developed conscious art, and this impression is further strengthened by the technical vocabulary of the early poets, the specialised metaphor of the Kennings. The art at its best is indeed highly developed, but the conventions scarcely carry us beyond the simplest figures, alliteration and metaphor, together with an occasional simile and a few rimes. Such metrical laws as can be deduced with any certainty are few in number and very simple. The modern "principles," however, offer such an imposing array that I may be pardoned for repeating the statement, already emphasised by Sievers and Schipper, that "the five-type theory is simply the expression of the rules of the alliterative verse obtained by a statistical method of observation." Speech-forms have been classified according to the frequency of their occurrence, but frequency alone proves little beyond the fact that some rhythmical outlines were more in keeping with the speech-habits of the race than others, or, for reasons to be discovered within the forms themselves, gave more satisfaction to the feeling for rhythm. The scholar's general conclusion is significant—"The fundamental principle of the structure of the alliterative line, as we find it in historical times, is that of free change of rhythm."[16]

Primitive tribes of to-day, noted for their rhythmical skill, exhibit in their most advanced tunes just such a free change,—that subtle variation of movement which cannot

[16] See *History of English Versification*, by Jacob Schipper. (1910), p. 23.

be represented by the rigid bar-system of music—and it would appear that the cultivation of the pure feeling for rhythm begets, at all times, a similar freedom. Corroborative evidence of some value is to be obtained from the recent history of ball-room dancing in Europe, where the primitive melodies of the black man and the red have produced a rapid development of the *feeling* for rhythm. The skill which separates the expert dancer from the beginner might be measured roughly by the freedom with which he interchanges different rhythmical movements. It is a far cry from modern dancing to Old English metres, yet both illustrate the "non-sequence" form of primitive rhythm.

That the rhythmical freedom of alliterative poetry proves such verse to have been recited rather than sung is a further argument that calls for passing notice; for until more is known about early Teutonic music one may hesitate to accept that conclusion. Other historical evidence may justify the opinion but rhythm alone is no sure guide in the matter. Is not primitive music itself rich in the so-called "free" forms? The rustic ballad-singer finds no difficulty in adjusting many or few words, long or short syllables, to his stock melody. There are so many possible ways of setting words to music that conjecture as to Old English is useless, but it may be of interest to consider those Welsh poems, mentioned above, which were invariably sung to a musical accompaniment.

In Wales, poetry and music were separate professions, words and melodies were composed independently of each other, and it was the performer's business to sing his verses to any given melody. The art of fitting words to music still flourishes amongst the Welsh *penillion* singers, who, having gauged the length of the verse as compared with the musical phrase, will frequently leave a few bars to the

harpist alone and join in at the precise point where the word-rhythm will coincide with the music. That the metres in question were almost as free in rhythmical outline as the Old English verses can be seen by a glance at the disposition of the accents, *e.g.*

Lléddf, lléddf yr awron yw'r llýn,
Ádeg ei ósteg éstyn
Drósto rhyw hwyrol drístwch
Lle rhwyfai dáu, gýnnau, gŵch.

It must be admitted that the continuity of the Old English form and the fact that the sense frequently ends with the first half-line, seem to favour the recitation theory but on second thoughts those arguments are only a little more convincing than the irregularity of outline. Stichic verse can be sung, as the Welsh practice shows, and the hemistich, since it is virtually the rhythmic unit of Old English, might easily be treated as the basis of a musical setting. With an equal show of reason one might argue that the sense-break in the alliterative line served the purpose of the singer, enabling him to link his "themes" together in a steady flow of melody, and giving him a further opportunity to display his skill. There is little to be gained from vague speculation however ; it is sufficient to point out the danger of confusing opinions with established facts.

Here we do not trespass on the preserves of the philologist who alone is qualified to pass judgment on the accuracy of the five-type classification. Our interest lies in the paucity of detail in the pattern and the variability of the spoken lines. What is known with certainty is that the half-line of two accents is found in such widely different forms as :

Grẹndles mōdor ′ × ′ ×
duguðe and geoguðe ′ × × × ′ × ×
sẹcge ic ðē tō sōðe ′ × × × × ′ ×
þār wæs hæleða hleahtor × × ′ × × ′ × } Type A.

næs Bēowulf þār × ′ × ′
hē æfter rẹcede wlāt × × × ′ × × ′
ac hine wundra þæs fela × × × ′ × × ′ × } Type B.

be sām twēonum × ′ ′ ×
þæt him his winemāgas × × × ′ × ′ × } Type C.

bearn Ẹcgðēowes ′ ′ ` ×
lēoht inne stōd ′ ′ × `
họnd swenge ne ofteāh ′ ′ × × × ` } Type D.

wīdcūðne mann ′ ` × ′
gīganta geweorc ′ ` × × ′ [17] } Type E.

In a discussion of pattern the word "variable" applied to such verse is something of a misnomer, since according to my own definition the basic unit is a constant. This, however, is one of the occasions on which it is reasonable to be illogical: for the simple scheme allows so much freedom in the execution that verse of Type I is most suitably described by reference to the spoken form.

Illustrations need not be drawn exclusively from Old English, for the variable structure, although it has been

[17] The notation indicates relative degrees of accent. ′ = main, ` = subsidiary, and × = weak accent. ⏑ is a quantitative sign and denotes the substitution of two short syllables for the long one which usually accompanies the main accent.

largely superseded by more regular metres, still reappears, sometimes in its original form but more frequently in combination with other types. The principle is clearly at work in much of the free-verse of the Whitman school ; and is to be found in its purity in *The Leaf Burners* of Ernest Rhys. Consider, for example, the amount of syllabic material and the distribution of accent in the following half-lines.

Much I thought then
of men that went forth,
Or dropt like the leaves,
to die and to live ;
While the leaf burners
with their long brooms
Drew them together
on the day of their death.

§ 3

Metrical language has a double appeal, to the senses and to the intellect. In verse of the first type the former predominates but as the intellectual element becomes more prominent the ideal pattern demands an increasing amount of attention ; the pleasure arising from the perception of form takes a larger share in the total experience.

One opens an anthology and finds Henley's poem concluding with the lines :

So be my passing !
My task accomplish'd and the long day done,
My wages taken and in my heart
Some late lark singing,
Let me be gather'd to the quiet west,
The sundown splendid and serene,
Death.

followed on the next page by Hodgson's :

'Twould ring the bells of Heaven
The wildest peal for years,
If Parson lost his senses
And people came to theirs—

and the contrast at once brings out the difference I wish to emphasise. Both passages give evidence of order and proportion in the arrangement of the words, yet the first relies for its effect mainly upon our sense of rhythm. We feel without penetrating the subtlety that the proportions are just. In the second, however, not only do we feel, but we understand at least something of the structure. Obviously the second passage is simpler in the sense that there is more regularity in its design but at the same time the ideal scheme offers more detail to the mind. The groups of sounds resemble each other so closely that they challenge our attention. In much the same way one might contrast the dignity of a rough-hewn column with the finished perfection of an obelisk. Although the eye may delight in one as much as in the other the mind is more forcibly arrested by the studied proportions of the latter, notwithstanding the fact that greater care and thought may have gone to the production of the rugged mass. In the same way, when dealing with the appeal made by verse, we need not take account of the poet's conscious artistry, the amount of thought which he has given to his structure. So far as the reader is concerned the simpler rhythm may offer the more detailed pattern.

Greater regularity is the result of a closer resemblance between the units and in Hodgson's scheme we have a perceptible ordering of the parts of the wave in addition to the phrase and line-grouping. This similarity between the individual waves is the mark by which I would

distinguish all other verse from that which I have called variable. Metres of the second and third types create a more definite anticipation. We read :

> Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
> And summer's lease hath all too short a date.

or

> Ere Mor the Peacock flutters, ere the Monkey
> People cry,
> Ere Chil the Kite sweeps down a furlong sheer—

and perceiving that the smaller parts of the structure are similar, we know, more clearly than in Type I, what to expect in the following lines.

One method of obtaining the necessary resemblance is to restrict the number of sounds or syllables per wave. The variable waves were alike in so far as each consisted of a crest and trough : now, however, a fixed number of parts provides additional similarity. Although the reader may not stop to count, he is led to expect the same number and the anticipation becomes the most prominent part of the rhythmical experience on its intellectual side. In the scale of patterns, less and more clearly defined, there lies a region where the numbering principle is uppermost, where the " marginal attention " is occupied by number in the literal sense.[18] The principle is so familiar that it needs no special illustration. Regularity such as one finds in :

> Meadows trim with Daisies pide,
> Shallow Brooks and Rivers wide,

> The curfew tolls the knell of parting day
> The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,

[18] Sir Philip Hartog's paper *On the Relation of Poetry to Verse* contains an interesting view of the function of metre. (English Association Pamphlet, July, 1926.)

is so clearly established that only when some syllable is added to or omitted from the spoken verse does the reader realise that he has been counting.

There is another factor, however. Simplification of the time-scheme is a second and no less important means of increasing the resemblance between units, and in practice that is effected by distributing the waves at equal intervals, or by carrying the process further and giving to the syllables within the period fixed proportions to each other. The time-principle is almost certain to intervene where there is any approach to regularity, and presumably most people feel that the ideal scheme is isochronous, as to period at least. Proportions in time, of course, are essential to every sound-rhythm, but here we are dealing with relationships that are perceived. The mind begins to notice that the intervals are measured and time-values become part of the basic pattern.

Numbering and timing are so closely associated that no clear line could be drawn between them, yet there is a vast body of verse in which the time-element is so far subsidiary to the other that the demands of the scheme are satisfied by numerical equality of the parts or a close approximation to it. The reader or writer is free within certain limits to put his own interpretation on the length of the syllables in the pattern. Even when periods are isochronous the lesser divisions may vary, and because of this uncertainty the base of the second type is here described as *doubtful*.[19]

[19] The accepted term, "syllabic verse," has a different connotation. It carries with it the idea of the line-group and is too often associated with the classical conception of quantity. Besides, my purpose is to direct attention to the process of numbering rather than the syllabic material.

Type II, therefore, includes all verse in which the internal structure of the wave is fixed as to number of syllables but remains variable in its time-distribution. Part of the scheme being left blank, so to speak, the gaps are filled in by the rhythmical sensation of the spoken words ; the gaps in this case, of course, are small in comparison with those of Type I.

The freedom thus offered makes it possible for the poet to change the movement as often as he may wish without disturbing the regularity which the form presents to the mind. He may give definite time-values to a particular line or phrase, with the result that the great majority of his readers will feel the same rhythm at that point, but he is under no obligation to continue the movement since no anticipation of the kind has been aroused. Elsewhere, readers may and do differ widely in their interpretation of the pattern, each filling it in according to his own sense of rhythm or persuading himself, unconsciously it may be, to hear in the sounds values he has been trained to expect. I may be accused of making a mountain out of a molehill, especially since it is impossible, in the present state of our knowledge, to say how far slight differences of movement affect the emotional content of verse. The exact nature of the order perceived would appear to be a very small matter. " It is not as though given rhythms and line-lengths had any peculiar emotional significance attached to them. A dirge may be in racing anapæsts, laughter in the most sedate iambic measure."[20] Still, the fact remains that the experience represented by those anapæsts and iambs is not the same for all hearers : and it is part of the business of science to record facts however trivial they may seem. Thus, in analysing " doubtful " verse we cannot

[20] Mr. John Drinkwater's essay on *The Lyric*. p. 47.

hope to agree on all occasions, because we do not hear the same thing.

The controversy which has raged round the so-called iambic and trochaic metres goes to show that the doubtful nature of the base is not merely a matter of private opinion. The most competent authorities employ the same arguments to support opposite contentions. Professor Abercrombie states his opinion with characteristic force : " Some musical theorists have postulated that the blank verse foot — ⏑ is to be given not as ♩ ♩ but as ♩ 𝅗𝅥 or 𝅗𝅥 ♩ . This is too shocking to common sense and simple experience to need refutation."[21] T. S. Omond, discussing the belief that iambic verse is in triple time, writes : " There is little matter for surprise in this, since anyone listening merely to the syllables of a line, would in most cases come, as our orthodox prosody came, to this conclusion."[22] On such a question discussion is futile, since the base may be felt in either way ; but this at least is certain, that when disyllabic verse is read aloud most lines are spoken in something approaching triple time. My experience is borne out by Dr. Sonnenschein's quantitative analysis of the speech-values.

Some trisyllabic metres too may be heard in duple or triple time without distortion of the speech-sounds, as for example, Scott's *Coronach*, the poems beginning :

" What was he doing, the great god Pan,
Down in the reeds by the river ? "
(" A Musical Instrument."—*E. B. Browning.*)

" Love is enough : though the World be a-waning,
And the woods have no voice but the voice of complaining."
(*William Morris.*)

[21] *Principles of English Prosody*, by Lascelles Abercrombie. (1923). p. 156.

[22] Op. cit., p. 182.

or the movement of Swinburne's *Itylus* :

"What hast thou found in the spring to follow?
What hast thou found in thine heart to sing?
What wilt thou do when the summer is shed?"

We all know that the unit in the last example is a wave of three syllables in the order ′ × ×, but some will consider the ideal syllables to be of equal duration, others will feel that the stressed element is twice as long as an unstressed. That is, some will distribute the parts as $\frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{3}$, others as $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{4}$. We are dealing now with genuine differences of experience, not with possible errors in analysis. Variant forms are to be distinguished from ambiguous metre in which stresses themselves can be arranged in different ways, and the reader is left in doubt as to the number of syllables in the unit. Then it may be that the writer has not given sufficient guidance, or the fault may lie with the reader himself, as in the recorded instance of Swinburne's *Hertha* being treated as disyllabic.

To the scientist, perhaps, the element of uncertainty which marks my second type is a serious flaw in any classification. It has certainly been a source of great dissention amongst prosodists; yet, in practice, the "doubtful base" is far from being a disadvantage. Most of our verse is of this type; regular in structure and yet free to change. The greatest achievement in the history of English versification is the perfection of a form which at once pleases the mind by its order and delights the senses by its elasticity. In no other type do we find the same amount of detail in the scheme combined with such flexibility in the utterance.

Such a base is peculiarly suitable to a language like English, in which the speech-accent is well-marked, the grammatical structure analytic, and the vocabulary rich in monosyllabic and disyllabic words. The restriction of the number of parts in a wave, therefore, is not a matter of

great difficulty. Whatever be the reason—and prosody is not obliged to find one—our doubtful metres rarely employ more than two or three syllables per unit. Many things may happen when the lines are spoken, of course, but that is matter for a separate discussion. Of the two or three parts in the scheme, one only can bear the stress, which marks the wave-crest, and whatever system of measurement we adopt, the stresses will be regularly distributed so long as the numbering principle is maintained; regularly, in the sense that the crest will occupy the same position in each wave.

I ask the reader's pardon for so much talk that seems to be "about it and about." I hope, however, that my reasons for insisting on the apparently self-evident will reveal themselves as we proceed.

§ 4

"Classification," says a modern reviewer, "is not an end in itself but a convenient way of summarizing our knowledge." That is true, and we need not be alarmed if our summary fails to account for every possible example. Natural phenomena have a disconcerting habit of refusing their places in our systems, and the more exact the science, the more troublesome are the border-line cases. Even with a difference so obvious as that between plant and animal the biologist finds himself in difficulties.

Let me confess at once that the border between my second and third types is almost too broad to be called a line. One cannot always decide with certainty how far the base is defined, but that does not affect our general principle, for in the main, the "doubtful" and "fixed" patterns are easily distinguished from each other. Metres which are clearly of the second type, like :

"When you are old and gray and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep.

or

"Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul."

are not likely to be confused with such rhythms as :

"Oh, maybe it was yesterday, or fifty years ago !
Meself was risin' early on a day for cuttin' rushes,"

and

"Chicken-skin, delicate, white,
Painted by Carlo Vanloo,
Loves in a riot of light,
Roses and vaporous blue."

The difference is not merely a question of counting syllables or accents, nor is the problem explained by calling the latter verses "coincident." Coincidence of accent and stress is but one sign of the change that has taken place.

Take the last extract (from Dobson's *Ballade on The Pompadour's Fan*) as a special instance. There the syllables are strictly numbered, three to each wave, but that is not the only, indeed it is not the most noticeable resemblance between the units. Regular timing is so clearly a part of the scheme that by nothing short of wilful distortion of the language could one fail to grasp the exact pattern which was in the writer's mind. Certainly such a metre is not to be classed as "doubtful." Temporal order takes precedence of the numerical to such a degree that a few syllables more or less do not come amiss provided they can be comfortably spoken in the allotted time. As

we approach the upper limit of the doubtful class—assuming for the moment that the development is upward—syllable-counting becomes less and less important. The poet, taking advantage of the duration of words in ordinary speech, begins to rely on timing and to depart from fixed number, as in " Cuttin' Rushes," which illustrates the kind of variety usually found in timed-verse.

The base of Moira O'Neill's poem consists of four waves, each divided into four equal parts, and in the lines quoted, except at the ends where silence takes the place of sound, each part is represented by a syllable. Thus, measuring between the stresses, we have :

" Me | self was risin' | early on a | day for cuttin' | rushes "
| ˏ | ˏ | ˏ | ˏ
– | – – – – | – – – – | – – – – | – –

But elsewhere the same pattern is conveyed by other means, *e.g.*

" Walkin' up the | Brábla' burn, | still the sun was low,
| – – – – |
Now I'd hear the | búrn run an' | then I'd hear the
thrushes. | – – – – |
| Yóung, still | yóung ! -an' | drenchin' wet the grass,
| – – – – | – – – – |
| Hére, lad, | hére ! will ye | follow where I pass.
| – – – – | – – – – |
| Yésterday, | yésterday, or | fifty years ago
| – – – – | – – – – |
For all that's fair, I'd sooner see a | búnch o' green |
| – – – – |
rushes."

Consider the anticipation created by this rhythm. The pattern no longer unfolds itself in two or three-part groups, octosyllabic and decasyllabic lines : here one is

scarcely aware of the number of syllables. What the ear demands is a satisfactory rendering of a given temporal pattern.

Type III, therefore, is that in which the attention is at once arrested by an ordered distribution of time-values. But speech-sounds, in English at least, are not associated with fixed values in time. Hence, it follows that here more than in other types the writer's choice of words is limited by the demands of his metrical structure ; the spoken line must resemble the base more closely. The gaps in the scheme are so slight that sensation and perception frequently coincide. Indeed, we need scarcely distinguish between the actual and the ideal structure, because the former, with rare exceptions, is merely an approximate rendering of the latter ; not a different movement set out in contrast with the base. I do not imply that the appeal to the senses has diminished—far from it—but rather that the function of the sensuous element has changed. The design behind the words is something complete in itself, an order so clearly apprehended that when once established it takes possession of the words and moulds them into conformity with itself. The reader lingers on one syllable, rushes over another, and obtains comparative regularity by a series of infinitesimal changes of the ordinary speech values. The attraction is sometimes so powerful that when reading aloud we are concerned with trying to avoid rather than to discover the pattern. We feel that the syllables can be adjusted to coincide with the regular base, and in the mind they are so arranged, but respect for the meaning and for normal prose rhythms forbids such mechanical delivery. The question of spoken verse, however, belongs by right to a later chapter.

The necessity to follow the base closely restricts the range of Type III, since, as in the other arts, the nature

of the medium determines the kind of pattern which may be attempted. A glance at the examples will show that metres under this head are strictly isochronous. Theoretically of course, there is no reason why time-schemes should be confined to the ratio of equality ; yet no other proportion seems to be possible with a medium so unstable as the English language. Whatever be the explanation, we are safe in saying that where timing is clearly defined the metre is conspicuous for its regularity. Even in "numbered" verses most of the so-called hypermetrical and catalectic lines are to be explained by the sudden emergence of the time-principle.

Variations like those in *Cuttin' Rushes* diversify the form but do not change the wave-length. This base, which at first sight appears to be flexible enough, is really more rigid than any other. The essential factors of rhythm, time and stress, are both clearly anticipated, and for that reason I describe the third type as *fixed.*

Here belong all those verses which go with a lilt and swing, the rollicking and the martial rhythms, and that smooth gliding movement which gives to the lyric its peculiar singing quality The rhythmical beat is so insistent that we cannot misunderstand the "tune," provided that we have no pre-conceived notions as to what the structure should be, *e.g.* :

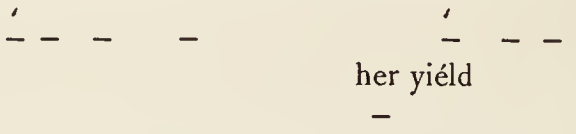
"It's North you may run to the rime-ringed sun
Or South to the blind Horn's hate,
Or East all the way into Mississippi Bay
Or West to the Golden Gate."

This is all very simple—but when the prosodist sets about representing the experience on paper he must go warily, because there has been so much confusion between

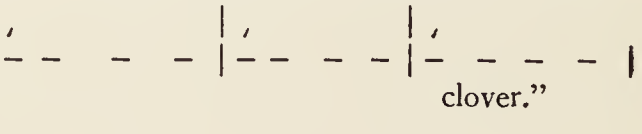
different systems of measurement. No serious objection can be taken to the use of crotchets and quavers here, for fixed verse is furthest removed from prose and nearest to the musical convention. Yet musical theorists, too, often forget that the analogy between notes and syllables is incomplete. A speech-sound cannot be curtailed or lengthened unduly, and the accepted distribution of stress in the bar-system does not necessarily hold for verse. The "quadruple" period may be taken as an example, all the more pertinent since it occurs so frequently in poetry.

The musical term "quadruple" refers to a wave of four equal parts, of which the first bears a main, and the third a subsidiary stress,—an arrangement which is not uncommon in the spoken form of verse, but which, for a very good reason, is seldom carried over to the base. Since the accents in speech are never widely separated, the number of syllables that may be crowded into a period is limited. Thus, if the poet wishes to suggest a wave of a considerable number of parts, let us say four or six, he is forced when announcing his scheme in the first place to economise in syllables lest the grouping be obscured. Normally he gives a lead by using one syllable for each part in several of the periods, as Kipling has done at the beginning of the poem just quoted.

"There's a whisper down the field where the year has shot



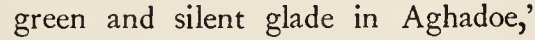

Singing—Over then, come over, for the bee has quit the



But if he goes further and tries to introduce a subsidiary stress by employing speech-accent—which is the only means at his disposal—the form is again in danger of breaking down into smaller groups. The thing can be done of course, as in Todhunter's :

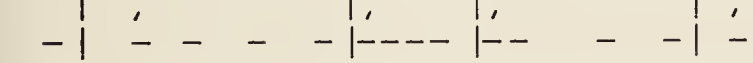
" There's a glade in Aghadoe, Aghadoe, Aghadoe,

There's a green and silent glade in Aghadoe,"



but in verse it is comparatively rare. The usual arrangement is such as we find in Macaulay's *Battle of Naseby*,

" O, wherefore come ye forth in triumph from the North,"



with no definite subsidiary stress on the third part of the wave. That, in strict musical parlance, is duple time, but it will be a great convenience to me if I can use the term " quadruple " to describe a wave of four equal parts of which the first only is stressed. Similarly " triple " and " duple " may be used for three- and two-part waves respectively.

With those reservations in mind, we may proceed to scan fixed verse very simply—showing the spread of the ideal time-values thus :

" Sherwood in the twilight, is Robin Hood awake ?
1 2 3 4 1 2 (3) 4 1 2 3 4 1 (2 3 4)
Robin ! Robin ! Robin ! All his merry thieves
1 2 3 4 1 2(34) 1 2 3 4 1 2 (3 4)
Answer as the bugle-note shivers through the leaves.
1 2 3 4 1 2 3(4) 1 2 3 4 1 2 (3 4)
(" Sherwood."—*Alfred Noyes.*)

or

"It blooms once a year in summer moonlight,
4 1 2 3 4 1 2(3) 4 1 2 3 4 1 2
In a valley of dark fear full of pale moonlight."
3 4 1 2 3 4 12 3 4 12 3 4 1 2 (3 4)

("The Lily of Malud."—*J. C. Squire.*)

The last example will serve as well as another to show that time-names descriptive of the base do not necessarily indicate the number of syllables: we may have trisyllabic quadruple periods, disyllabic triple, and so on.

The variety of effects to be obtained from the same wave-form is evident when we consider the poems already mentioned and others like *Drake's Drum* (Newbolt), *The Roadside Fire* (Stevenson), *Lepanto* (Chesterton), *Phoebus and Admetus* (Meredith), or Cory's:

"They told me Heraclitus, they told me you were dead."

However great the variety, we must not allow the distribution of syllables to obscure the fact that all those poems are written on a quadruple base. That the danger of misunderstanding the terminology may not appear to be entirely imaginary, let me quote, from a work on prosody, a few lines of F. W. H. Myers's *Saint Paul.*

"Lo, if some strange intelligible thunder
12 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 (3 4)
Sang to the earth the secret of a star
12 3 4 1 2(3) 4 1 2 3 4 12 (3 4)
Scarce could ye catch, for terror and for wonder,
1 2 3 4 1 2(3) 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 (3 4)
Shreds of the glory that was shed so far."
1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 12 34 12

Baum describes this passage as "four-stress falling rhythm with intermixed duple, triple and quadruple time."[23] The comment makes it clear either that Mr. Baum's natural speech-rhythms are so unlike mine as to suggest another pattern, or that by "duple and triple time" he means something quite different. To me the lines appear as a straightforward homogeneous movement in four- or two-part waves, and although by an effort it can be felt as a mixture with triple, that is much less satisfactory.

Turning to the triple base we find the same characteristics,—insistent regularity and accent strongly-marked. The whole thing is constructed so closely "to pattern" that the range is even more limited here than in quadruple verse. Perhaps it is for that reason that the form seems less typical of English poetry as a whole. The reader may judge for himself, however, from the host of examples to be found in the Provençal verse-forms, Ballade, Rondel, Triolet and the like, or such familiar poems as *The Bridge of Sighs* (Hood), *How they brought the Good News* (Browning), *Agincourt* (Drayton), Swinburne's first chorus from *Atalanta*, and O'Shaughnessy's "We are the music makers." My suggestion has nothing to do with the prevalence of triple periods in English speech. Indeed, there is much to be said for the opinion that Teutonic rhythm is founded upon triple time.[24] The reference here is strictly confined to the fixed base as I have described it, *e.g.* :

"I was a child and she was a child
1 2 3 12 3 1 2 3 1 –

In this kingdom by the sea :
2 3 1 2 3 (1) 2 3 1 –

[23] *The Principles of English Versification*, by Paull Franklin Baum. (1922). p. 75.

[24] See *The Basis of English Rhythm*, by William Thomson. (1904).

But we loved with a love that was more than love
2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 12 3 12 (3)
I and my Annabel Lee."
1 2 3 1 2 3 1 –

Duple time, on the other hand, is rare. Disyllabic metres, although they far outnumber all others, belong for the most part to the doubtful class, since a wave of two parts only does not provide sufficient detail for fixing the outline. There are a few exceptions certainly, and sometimes one comes upon passages in which the two-beat rhythm is unmistakable, but seldom is the movement maintained long enough or repeated often enough to leave its mark on the whole composition. Duple usually merges into quadruple time by further sub-division, so that when the two kinds are almost equally distributed, as in the "Saint Paul" quotation, it matters little which name we use. Allingham, with his

"Wee folk, good folk,
Trooping all together;
Green jacket, red cap
And white owl's feather!"

comes very near to the fixed duple base, and Walter de la Mare's *Three Jolly Farmers* is written almost entirely in the measure. A most interesting example, in which the speech-accent is varied without obscuring the regular time-scheme, is furnished by R. L. Stevenson.

"In the highlands, in the country places,
1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2
Where the old plain men have rosy faces,
1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2
And the young fair maidens
1 2 1 2 1 2
Quiet eyes."
1 2 12

The scansion given here is partly retrospective, for Stevenson's plan is not at once revealed. The first line does little more than suggest possible schemes; but gradually the slow duple periods—"Essential silence chills and blesses," "old red hills are bird-enchanted"—assert themselves and produce a uniform movement which absorbs all minor inequalities.

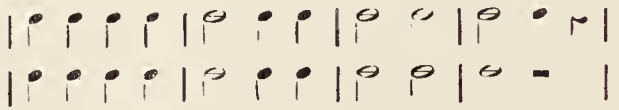
Before going further I would remind those who are not accustomed to musical terminology that, in spite of a general resemblance, the fixed patterns of Type III are not to be confused with the classical idea of "quantitative verse." An instrument like the kymograph or a fairly good sense of time will convince us that English syllables may be grouped as relatively long and relatively short, and we know that poets, measuring by ear, as they tell us, make use of this distinction. Thus it is possible for Dr. Sonnenschein to claim with complete justice that a great deal of English verse can be explained on a purely quantitative basis. Quantity in this sense—the total duration of the phonetic constituents of one syllable as compared with another—is the most convenient means of indicating temporal pattern. Whether we call it a "structural" element or not will depend on the exact meaning we attach to the word. Certainly English speakers do not think in terms of quantity. What we perceive in metre, even that of Type III, is not a sequence of short and long syllables, but an ideal order to which quantity itself is subservient. Dr. Sonnenschein's work is extremely valuable, but my interest lies in the fact that rhythmical structure is in a sense more important than the words which convey it. The pattern once established (by the aid of quantity), affects the values of speech-sounds, so that the same syllable can represent very different durations in the abstract scheme. The classical scholar emphasises the frequent coincidence of natural

quantity with time-value, whereas my concern is with the difference between them.

Meredith's *Love in the Valley*, for instance, is a timed metre of four quadruple waves :

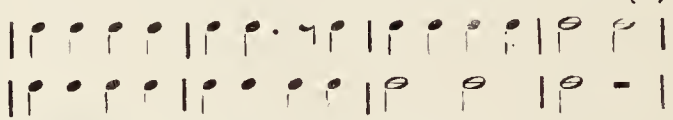
" Lovely are the curves of the white owl sweeping
1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 12 3 (4)
Wavy in the dusk lit by one large star "—
1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 12 3 4 12 (34)

or, for those who prefer it, the base can be given as :



But note the lines :

" Tell the grassy hollow that holds the bubbling
1 2 3 4 1 23 4 1 2 3 4
well-spring,
12 34
Tell it to forget the source that keeps it fill'd."
1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 12 34 12 (34)



The distribution in the last line may be

but judging from the rest of the poem, I surmise that the scansion given represents the writer's intention. No one would deny that the syllable " it " is relatively short, yet the section of pattern it occupies at the end of the line is twice as long as that at the beginning, and double the length of " source," which on its own merits is clearly a much longer syllable. Compare in the same way the values of the word " black " in the following lines from Chesterton's

*Lepanto*, and notice, in passing, that the duration is not dependent on the degree of stress.

" The walls are hung with velvet that is bláck and sòft as
1 2 3 4
sin,"

" In the gloom black-purple, in the glint old-gold,"
1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

" Black Azrael and Ariel and Ammon on the wing,"
3 4 1 2 3 4

" And above the ships are palaces of brówn, black-
1 2 3 4 1 2
bèarded chiefs,"
3 4

The last line not only illustrates the danger of confusing time-value with quantity but raises the problem of pauses, an important subject in any discussion of timed verse. The distinction between metrical and non-metrical stops requires no explanation, for we know from common experience that the " period " may be partly filled in by silence ; either the scarcely perceptible pause used to eke out the spoken syllable, or the distinct omission of a beat as in the well-worn : " Break, break, break," or De la Mare's " However rare—rare it be." Such pauses may be passed over here, as they present little difficulty. The real source of annoyance is the non-metrical stop.

It is astonishing to find how long the ear will carry a rhythm in suspension. Over the stream of sound we have more control than Canute could exercise over the sea, for at will we can arrest the waves in their progress, stay them for a time then bid them resume their course. The street-singer will often exercise this power, even to excess. Pausing in mid-note he will trudge to the pavement to receive a copper, return to his position and take up his

melody by completing the interrupted bar. The same kind of thing may be seen in verse. Take the stanza :

> " Peace ; come away : the song of woe
> Is after all an earthly song :
> Peace ; come away : we do him wrong
> To sing so wildly : let us go."

Aggressive timers will probably measure all the grammatical and rhetorical stops in those lines : to others the stops after " Peace " will form a metrical variation, those after " away " and " wildly " will be non-metrical suspensions : others, still, will treat them all as indefinite. In the absence of direct evidence as to the writer's intention, no theorist is justified in making a final pronouncement. The most effective delivery is a matter for the elocutionist to decide ; but most people will admit that, in this stanza, the rhythmical flow may be interrupted without destroying the pattern. The indefinite pause, although for obvious reasons it occurs less frequently in Type III than elsewhere, is all the more remarkable when it does appear in a timed verse. Browning puts the matter beyond all doubt. He has no hesitation about breaking up his periods,—the movement ceases without loss of time. In the *Toccato of Galuppi's*—a quadruple base of the form

we come upon :

> " What ? Those lesser thirds so plaintive, sixths diminished, sigh on sigh,
> Told them something ? Those suspensions, those solutions—' Must we die ? '
> Those commiserating sevenths—' Life might last ! we can but try ! '

'Were you happy?'—'Yes'—'And are you still
3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3

as happy?'—'Yes. And you?'
4 1 2 3 4 1 (2)

—'Then, more kisses.'—'Did I stop them when a million seemed so few?'

Hark! the dominant's persistence, till it must be answered to."

Apart from misconceptions due to non-metrical pauses and to "quantity," strictly timed verse is very easy to recognise. Even to the most uncultivated ear language in this form cannot appear other than metrical; so that some prosodists, assuming with unquestioning faith that art always lies in concealing art, have despised the fixed base for its frank self-assertion and spoken of it as "on a lower plane," "heel-rhythm which appeals to children and savages." One is relieved to know that so many poets of standing have ranged themselves with the children and the savages. The limitations of the form, of course, are freely admitted, but that it is not devoid of subtlety and power is shown by the examples already given. The strength of Type III lies in its simplicity and directness: its chief weakness is a lack of flexibility.

The present view of metre, then, is founded on the belief, already widely accepted, that perception of pattern is essential; and further, that the clue to pattern is to be found in the nature of the anticipation created. The study of the experience rather than the words leads me to conclude that the intellectual element, necessary to all metre, is present in different degrees: that between the extremes of pure sensation and perfect comprehension the proportion of rhythm felt to rhythm perceived may vary endlessly.

A discussion confined to "pattern" must perforce deal largely with the experience, yet in stressing the psychological rather than the linguistic study of metre one has to guard against underestimating the importance of the latter. The sensation of rhythm is, of course, part of the experience, but to elucidate that particular part psychology itself must fall back on careful examination of the spoken sounds. It is as foolish to deny the value of results obtained by the patient industry of generations of prosodists, as to accept all their conclusions without question.

No extravagant claim can be made on behalf of the classification adopted here, for no one knows better than the psychologist how difficult it is to reach the experience. "Anybody with a prejudice," says Professor Scripture, "can be made to hear anything: all that is necessary is to create the proper expectation."[25] Yet after making allowance for this difficulty, there remains the need for some method of approach such as I have attempted.

[25] See *The Nature of Verse*, by E. W. Scripture, in "British Journal of Psychology. (Jan., 1921.)

# THE SPOKEN LINE.

"There are two distinct schemes or strands of time and accent, in general coincident, but occasionally showing themselves independent."—*Prof. Sylvester. circa.* 1880.

"The laws of prosody have one common purpose; to keep alive the opposition of two schemes simultaneously followed."
—*R. L. Stevenson.*

## § 1

AS a necessary preliminary to the subject of spoken verse let me return to the "interpretation difficulty" mentioned above, and especially to Joshua Steele's remark that "all people, orators of pulpit, bar and stage, are but as players of voluntaries exhibiting by ear." The general fitness of the comparison is clear enough, for the actor, delivering his lines, stands to the poet in much the same relationship as the executive musician to the composer: the audience, whether it be in theatre or concert-hall, recognises the performance as one of many possible renderings. If the analogy were complete there would be no excuse for drawing attention to anything so obvious, but the fact that the actor is interpreting by ear changes the whole problem.

The performer of music works from the "base," so to speak; he begins with the abstract proportions and adds such variety as the composer suggests and his own taste demands, but his variations are always within the scheme. The process is reversed, when, as in poetry, the ideal order must be deduced from a slightly distorted reflection of it. Most of us have experienced the mental groping and hesitation which accompanies the first reading of the opening lines in all but the most familiar metres. Even after the clue has been found we are frequently obliged to "extemporise" rather than "interpret," for it is left to us to discover how the given words can be uttered without

destroying the basic order. We are persuaded, without our knowledge as a rule, to collaborate in building the structure. Music and poetry then, are not strictly comparable, for in one the form can be studied apart altogether from the execution ; in the other, with the exception of Type III, the final outline depends on the performer, more or less according to the part played by the sensation of rhythm.

The problem, it will be said, does not come within the range of prosody. That may be so, but it certainly does affect the hearing of verse. The difference between one reading and another may be so great that we could not even suppose the order felt in the sensation to be the same in both cases, and that fact alone is sufficient to warrant some inquiry into the nature and extent of the speech-variations.

The axiomatic truth, that the spoken line never is and never can be a perfect representation of the ideal scheme, covers all sorts of divergences, some mere trifles and others of the first magnitude ; those which are planned by the poet, those which are inherent in the medium, and those which are entirely due to the idiosyncrasies of the speaker. To the poet's variations I shall come in good time ; for the present let me confine my attention to the process of reflecting in speech such order as is perceived.

The intractability of the medium and necessity for minor adjustments is most evident when we attempt a close rendering of a regular pattern. Some combinations of sound cannot be pronounced with the rapidity or the accent which the scheme requires : consonant clusters impede the movement, non-metrical pauses are necessary for the meaning and other trivial difficulties arise. But in practice strict regularity is seldom our aim. Here, as elsewhere in the arts, the desire for diversity in likeness constantly urges us to seek variety. So long as the pattern remains

" fixed " we are in the position of the musician who interprets a score ; the actual or physical rhythm is simply an approach to the ideal. Presumably Stevenson was not thinking of Type III verse when he spoke of " keeping alive the opposition between two strands," for there is scarcely any opposition.

When, however, the reader comes upon lines which cannot by any legitimate process of adjustment be spoken as an approximate rendering of the base, he is forced to discover by ear what is for him the most satisfactory compromise. Normal speech-values claim his allegiance, and the basic rhythm continuing in the mind tends to mould the utterance to itself, so that the result is a nice balancing of forces in order to ensure the survival of the form. Some speakers, actors amongst others, seem to avoid the difficulty by abandoning verse in favour of rhetorical prose, but let me hasten to point out, that in extreme cases, it is almost impossible for the listener to tell whether the speaker perceives the base or not. We must either trust the performer or decide by a majority vote, because the amount of divergence which constitutes a variation for one man may destroy the whole scheme for another. Our metrical skill is limited by what is for us the maximum complexity in the utterance consistent with a clear perception of pattern, and as our skill increases the gap between the physical and the ideal form tends to grow wider. Not only do we accept as metrical lines which would have appeared irregular at an earlier stage, but in our interpretation of the regular lines we introduce a more elaborate " discant " when variety is felt to be desirable. Some people revel in keeping the strands apart, others cannot follow metre unless the speech reflects the pattern closely. To hear a line as blank verse the latter must contrive by one means or another to fit in five accents. Metrists even have been known to

scan lines consistently in that manner, and I have heard a worthy old schoolmistress read :

× ′ ×. ′ × ′ × ′ ×

"Far in the bosom of Helvellyn."

But we need not consider extremes. The variety of possible readings suggested for the first line of Paradise Lost is sufficient in itself to illustrate the flexibility of "unfixed" verse. On æsthetic grounds the prosodist may argue for one interpretation in preference to another but he has no right to assert that lines of this type must be heard in this or that way.

Some of my readers may protest that it is absurd to base any science on a thing so variable, that the result must assuredly be "confusion worse confounded." The suggestion would not be made but for the belief that in essence our experiences differ but little : they are made richer or poorer according to our sense of rhythm. Theories apart, the value of the speech-problem, even at its lowest estimate, is considerable, for prosodists as a race have never shown much respect for their rivals, and we are likely to be more tolerant of other views when we realise how far the sensation can change the content of the experience

Let it be clearly understood then, that the analyses given in this chapter represent one possible reading. Definite speech-values are postulated in order to illustrate principles, not as specimens of perfect interpretation. Those who have had practice in the analysis of rhythm can test the principles by substituting their own values : I shall take no further notice of variant forms except in those examples where alternative readings seem to me equally good.

The speaker's part in the final shaping of verse must not be stressed unduly lest we lose our sense of proportion, for, after all, the performer is of little importance compared with the writer, and I do not wish to give the impression

that verse-form is decided by mere personal whim or chance speech-habits. The fundamental order, first created in the poet's brain and afterwards manifested with varying degrees of clarity to the hearer, exists apart from all interpretations. The outline may be blurred in the reflection, but no one will question the existence of the thing reflected. Thus the pattern alone, as distinct from the complete verse-experience, can be treated objectively and we may then consider how the nature of the order proposed affects the spoken line.

§ 2

The complex sensation of prose-rhythm is so much more difficult to analyse than the measured periods of song that we must reverse the order of our classification and begin from Type III, which towards its upper limit presents the simplest of all rhythmical sensations, a movement at once isochronous—the accents falling at equal intervals, and homogeneous—all waves being sub-divided in the same way. Since the physical and ideal forms are here fused together the only problem which arises is that of adjusting language to the scheme, "hiding difference, making unevenness even." The general process has been sufficiently explained in the previous chapter : here I need only comment on the nature of the changes which take place. Everyone knows that words used in a sing-song metre are very different from the same words in prose, but it is not always easy to see how the appearance of regularity is obtained.

In spite of the clash of theories there is little doubt that speech-accent is the most powerful factor in determining pattern. "Time is, of all modes of existence, the most obsequious to the imagination," remarks Dr. Johnson in a very different connection ; and common experience suggests that, in English at least, quantities are more

susceptible of adjustment than accents,—which does not mean that quantity depends on accent nor that accent itself is invariable. Accentual values serve to indicate how syllables are to be grouped, and if there is any difficulty about obtaining the arrangement the duration rather than the grouping of syllables suffers in consequence. Nor is this surprising, for accent has a powerful influence on semantic values. A slight shifting of emphasis can alter the whole meaning, whereas the amount of extension or shortening of sounds necessary to give the appearance of regularity, is scarcely perceptible. But time, being the more elastic of the two factors, and also more likely to escape the English ear, has first claim on our attention at the moment.

When the syllabic material in one period happens to fall short of the normal duration the speaker may either pronounce the words more slowly or introduce minute pauses : if there is more material than usual he reduces the less important quantities so that more syllables can be spoken in the time, or, when that is impossible, he extends the period still preserving the relationship between its parts. When Kipling writes :

"There's a whisper down the field where the year has shot her yield
And the ricks stand gray to the sun
3 4 12 34 12 3 4 12 —

the period "ricks stand" is accepted as equivalent to "year has shot her." In reality they may be far from equal as a kymographic record of the speech would show. Mr. Baum, after examining scientific statistics, reaches the conclusion that "the ear is willing and able to pay very high for the 'variety' in uniformity which it requires."[26]

[26] Op. cit., p. 61.

No elaborate scientific method is necessary here, for the simple experiment of substituting other syllables will demonstrate the ease with which speech accommodates itself to the rhythm, and also the extent of the adjustment. Had the poet chosen a shorter word, let us say "sit," in place of "stand," there would be no perceptible change in the form, but if the burden of sound were increased a new speech adjustment would follow as a matter of course. Without changing the structure and without noticeable extension of the period we may read :

"With the ricks standing gray to the sun
3 4 12 3 4 12 3 4 12

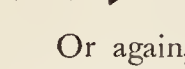
or

"And the ricks are standing gray to the sun."
3 4 1 2 3 4

One can well understand that syllables like "ricks - are -stand - ing" may seem equal to each other, but what happens when quantitative differences are clearly marked ? *e.g.* :

"There is laughter like the *fountains in that* face of all men feared,
It stirs the forest darkness, the *darkness of his* beard."
—(*Lepanto*).

There are at least two common methods of dealing with periods such as "fountains in that," "darkness of his." A system of borrowing and lending operates in all kinds of poetry. If one part of the wave demands more than its allotted time the others do their best to make shift with what remains of the period and the redistribution takes place without disturbing the even flow of the melody. When the sum of the quantities corresponds roughly with the normal duration of the wave there is no difficulty

The speed or "tempo" of the syllables may be affected slightly, but relative values are preserved. We hear "darkness of his" as : we say something like  .

Or again, a smooth concatenation of sounds may be our aim, a "legato" movement in which syllables, long and short, are chanted as nearly as possible with monotonous regularity. The process is neither so uncommon nor so difficult as it may appear to be. As far as I can judge by ear, it seems to involve slight changes of syllabic division. The word "syllable" used so frequently in etymological connections to denote a fixed combination of sounds, root, prefix, or the like, is somewhat misleading when applied to speech and especially to speech produced under the influence of a "fixed" pattern. A period is to be regarded not as an aggregation of separate parts but as a stream of sound alternately rising and falling according to the degree of accent and sonority of its components. The points of minimum accent, where sound fades into silence, form natural divisions, but it is often possible to shift the position of those points, to slur syllables together by reducing the off-glides and thus spread the consonant-sounds more evenly over the period. *e.g.*, the line :

"Mahound is in his paradise above the evening star"

ma-h*au*nd *iz in* h*iz* p*a*r a d*ai*s ə bʌv ðə iv n*i*ng st*a*r

becomes

ma-h*au*n-d*iz*-*in*-*iz*-p*a*-ra-d*ai*-zəb-ʌv-ðə-iv-n*i*ng st*a*r.

"The shady *sadness of a* vale," sæd-n*i*s ɔv ə, can be spoken as sæ-dn*i*-z*ɔ*-və.[27]

[27] The symbols are those used by Prof. H. C. Wyld.

I am not denying that the effective part of a syllable from the psychological point of view, is the vowel and following consonantal sound, but am trying to account for a manner of speech which is more sustained and more regular than the normal—one means of reducing inequalities. Whatever be the explanation—and I would not overrate the evidence of the unaided ear—the "legato" rendering is recognisably different from the other.

Neither method is effective beyond a certain limit. There are times when the unaccented material cannot be compressed. Long vowels and consonant-sequences which cannot be slurred force us to slacken pace, to retard the rhythm without altering its character.

"And above the ships are palaces of *brown*, *black-*
1 2 3 4 1 2

*bearded* chiefs"
3 4

is a good example of graceful movement, a sudden swoop followed by a slow recovery. The result is akin to the "tempo rubato" of music.

*cf.*

"And his face is as a fungus of a *leprous white and*
1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

grey
12

On them the sea-valves cluster and the *grey sea-*
1 2 3 4 1 2

*forests* curl,"
3 4

or an entirely different rhythm:

"Is it the tender tone
1 2 3 1 2 3

Soft as the *string'd harp's moan?*
1 2 3 1 2 3

O, it is truth alone,—
Eileen Aroon."

Changes of this kind lead us beyond the question of adjustment to the study of metrical variations,—a very natural transition, since these are the principal test of our powers of adjustment—and although an exhaustive treatment of that subject is no part of my present plan, I must, in the interest of what is to follow, refer to some devices by which monotony is avoided. That there may be no doubt as to the meaning of "variation" used in this connection, let us take a passage from the *Lily of Malud*, where the fixed base is treated with consummate skill. The poem begins with a clear announcement of the pattern :

"The lily of Malud is born in secret mud,
3 12 3 4 1(23)4 1 2 3 4 1 —
It is breathed like a word in a little dark ravine,"
3 4 12 3 4 12 3 4 1 2 3 4 12 —

with which I ask the reader to compare the following stanza.

"And the towering unseen roof grows more intricate and soon
It is featureless and proof to the lost forgotten moon.
But they could not look above as with blind-drawn feet they move
Onwards on the scarce-felt path, with quick and desperate breath,
For their circling fingers dread to caress some slimy head,
Or to touch the icy shape of a hunched and hairy ape,
And at every step they fear in their very midst to hear
A lion's rending roar or a tiger's snore . . .
And when things swish or fall, they shiver but dare not call."

Here the most obvious departures from the normal line are changes of accent rather than quantity. Since speech-stress is less inclined to yield to the demands of the scheme, any irregularity in its distribution is at once evident, especially when, as in the fourth line, the main accent of the period is affected. Clearly, such departures cannot be of frequent occurrence in Type III. If the fixed pattern is to survive, most of the ideal stresses require the support of spoken accent: otherwise the strong syllables will assert themselves in their new position and alter the nature of the movement. As a passing modulation, however, the omission of the strong beat comes as a pleasing surprise, a momentary baffling of the mind which increases our satisfaction when we pick up the trail afresh. Meanwhile our normal speech-values carry us over the gap either by a temporary change of rhythm or an adjustment of language. The sounds seem to acquire a double value. The mind tends to preserve the original order and construe the line as

′ × × × ` ` ′

"Onwards | on the scarce-felt | path" (roughly ); but the meaning of the words demands a slightly different spoken form, *e.g.*:

′ × × × ′ ` `

Onwards on the scarce-felt path, and that is sufficiently regular to give the sensation of .

This appearance of cross-currents playing upon the stream of sound is one of the most subtle and delightful effects to be obtained from verse; more subtle as a rule than the opposition of "parts" in music. Perhaps the closest musical analogy is the momentary clash when a direct rhythm passes into syncopation and vice-versa.

Similar in effect but less pointed is the modulation of the last line. There we are led towards the form "And when things swish or fall" by the anticipation of

3 4 12 3 4 12

a disyllabic prelude. Quantity and sense combine in favour

× ˋ ˋ ′ × ′

of "And when things swish or fall." The usual result

4 1 2 3 4 12

of a slight divergence is a neutral rendering of the words: in this instance a fairly level distribution of accent over the syllables "when things swish."

In the matter of speech-stress, no less than quantity, appearances are often deceptive. Many accents which, when we pause to consider the words, appear to be of equal strength, are seen to be subordinate if the connected passage is repeated several times until the ear can retain the whole rhythmical sensation. "Círcling," "fíngers," "caréss," "slímy," are equal on their own merits, but listen carefully to the line:

"For their círcling fingers dréad to caréss some slímy héad."

It will be noticed, however, that the strong beats, the sounds which represent ideal stresses, are not necessarily the points of maximum accent. So long as those points are sufficiently prominent to satisfy our expectation the ear is willing to accept great variety in the remainder of the period, and the poet, if he chooses, can produce a pattern within the pattern by employing subsidiary stress—subsidiary, that is, with regard to the base. The actual emphasis is frequently equal to or even greater than that which marks

| ˋ ˋ ′ × |

the wave-crest, *e.g.*: "as with | blind-drawn feet they|

′ | ˋ × ′ × | ′

move," "in their | very midst to | hear." This

medial accent has the effect of splitting the wave in two, so that we find groups of smaller units embedded in the larger; what the musician calls "compound time." The stanza before us contains at least fourteen periods of the kind.

I hope that the passage selected will serve to show without further demonstration that accent takes an important part in determining time-pattern. There is, of course, no fixed relationship between time and stress (compare "towering" and "intricate"); yet, on the whole, they support each other. The extension of time-value tends to increase the emphasis of a syllable. Contrast, for example:

"Dim drums throbbing in the hills *half* heard
Where risen from a doubtful seat and *half* attainted stall,"

or

"And the sea-folk labour and the *red* sails lift,
They rush in *red* and purple from the *red* clouds of the morn."

On the other hand, natural quantity is protected by accent against the levelling influence of the time-scheme, as in "blind-drawn," "scarce-felt," "black-purple," "old-gold" and a host of similar compound and quasi-compound words.

## § 3

The "separate strands" of which we catch a first glimpse in the variations of Type III become clearly defined in verse of the doubtful type. Somewhere about the middle of our scale we reach a point of maximum separation; then as we proceed toward the variable extreme the strands come together again until, in prose, the speech-form alone remains. We cannot go far in Type II without

encountering lines which in their spoken form are quite different from the base they represent. It is not simply that one outline fails to coincide with the other, as in those super-imposed pictures of red and blue at which children gaze through parti-coloured spectacles : here the divergences are so frequent and so pronounced that any attempt to bring the strands together would end in a grotesque distortion of speech.

Take the case of decasyllabic verse, at once the most important and best-known example of this type in English. The essential features of its pattern are clear enough despite the fact that some people describe it as duple-time, others as triple, and others again say that timing is negligible. The majority will admit that the base is a homogeneous rhythm of five disyllabic waves ; yet the modulations of it are seldom homogeneous and very often give the impression of having three, four, or even six waves. Thus we find lines like :

" Numberless and immeasurable halls " (*Adonais*, 92).

" In thy devastating omnipotence " (*Adonais*, 613).

" Speak ! roar ! shout ! yell ! ye sleepy Titans all "
(*Hyperion*, 316).

" Burnt after them to the bottomless pit "
(*Par. Lost*, VI, 866).

in which the basic rhythm is almost entirely submerged. To the mind, of course, those lines appear as satisfactory equivalents for the scheme, and we can easily persuade ourselves to hear five units in the utterance. Almost any sequence indeed, provided it contains approximately the same number of sounds, will adapt itself to a pattern that is thoroughly established. But the peculiar beauty and power of the irregular line as used by the great masters is not obtained by substituting *any* chance arrangement which

can be construed as a variant of the order anticipated. One is tempted, then, to inquire why some arrangements are so much more effective than others, and to look for some principle behind the opposition of rhythms.

The usual method of scanning blank verse gives no help here, for prosody does not undertake to do more than define the scheme and show how the words can be applied to it. All that is necessary, according to the stress theory, is to take the base × ′ | × ′ | × ′ | × ′ | × ′ |, point out the divergences and coincidences in speech, *e.g.* : Deep in | × ′ | × ′ | × × | × ′ the sha|dy sad|ness of | a vale, and dismiss the matter by saying that the variation is pleasant or otherwise. The actual words, therefore, appear to be rhythmical only in virtue of their connection with the base ; for if we consider the distribution of accent alone, Keats' line presents an irregular sequence—a b b a b a b b b a—(a = strong, b = weak) which does not seem any more orderly when the symbols are grouped in twos. The system does what it professes to do, but in bringing out the connection between the strands, it gives what I feel to be an utterly false impression of the rhythmical sensation.

The spoken line, however irregular, is something more than a mangled version of the pattern. Removed from its verse-setting the sequence of sounds still retains the order and proportion which belongs to it as a sensation ; for whilst the attention is focussed upon the base, the images, or the meaning, the ear continues to deal with the sense-impressions, to group the sounds in the way most convenient to itself, and find a new order in the accents and quantities presented. " Irregular " the line may be called, in contrast with the established form ; yet the utterance is not in itself a-rhythmical, nor does it derive its proportions from the

ideal scheme. Does not the following passage show, without detailed analysis, that it is possible to hear one rhythm and perceive another at the same time?

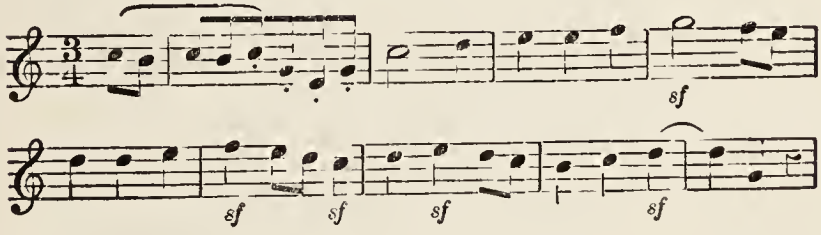
"Do ye forget the blows, the buffets vile?
Are ye not smitten by a youngling arm?
Dost thou forget, sham Monarch of the Waves
Thy scalding in the seas? What, have I rous'd
Your spleens with so few simple words as these?"

Modulations of this kind produce a double form, two distinct lines of impressions, one arising from the actual sounds and vaguely felt to be ordered, the other due to our expectation and clearly perceived as metrical (*i.e.* in measured units). The result is a species of verse which is partly of the nature of speech and partly of song, and my immediate concern is to point out that the speech element is far more regular than is generally realised.[28]

The simultaneous combination of different rhythms is familiar in the sister arts of music and dancing. How often in music do we find triple time super-imposed on duple, or quadruple on triple! And in that type of dancing which appropriates the title "aesthetic," what a range of effects are to be obtained from the visible contrast of rhythmical movements performed by different limbs! General evidence points to the conclusion that the development of the sense of rhythm brings with it the desire for an opposition of forms such as we have been considering. The development may take place on the side of sensation or perception. That is to say, we derive greater pleasure from the sensation of rhythm as we learn to assimilate

[28] Thomas Macdonagh, in his little book on *Campion*, makes a distinction between "speech-verse," "song-verse," and "chant," which goes far toward a solution of our problem, but I do not think his theory of "isochronous lines" is tenable.

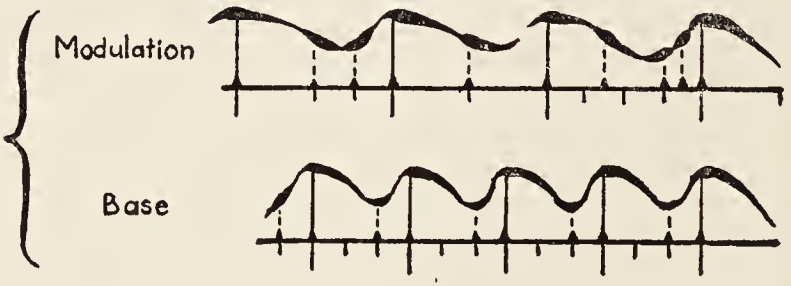
and reproduce more complicated forms, and on the other hand, intellectual pleasure is increased by greater ability to analyse, to understand the relationships. In either case, as the power grows, two rhythms are felt to be more satisfactory than one. In the domain of rhythm the single strand is to the double very much as melody is to harmony in tone : the experience produced by two " parts " has a richness and body which makes the other seem thin and flat by comparison. It must not be assumed, however, that the double form is always to be preferred, any more than that harmony is superior to melody.

The present analogy is not to be pushed too far. Verse, using one set of words to produce a double impression, must gain its effect by means other than those of music and dancing, where two physical rhythms are presented simultaneously. Since the poet relies for one of his " parts " on the survival of an auditory image in the memory, he is not free to place any desired rhythm against any other, but must give them sufficient in common to serve as a link between the strands. Occasionally the musician contrives, by means of special signs, to place a physical and an ideal form in opposition, *e.g.* : Beethoven in the Scherzo of the 7th Sonata (Violin and Piano), Op. 30, No. 2.

yet, even then, the device is far more obvious than in language.

The amount of resemblance which is necessary to connect the modulation with the base, clearly depends

on the nature of the pattern and its familiarity, which, by the way, is one of the chief arguments for conventional forms in poetry. The metre of blank verse is not only flexible by reason of its " doubtful " pattern ; it is so familiar through constant usage that definite modulation is possible from the first line of the poem. The connecting link may be very slight, frequently nothing more than the number of syllables ; but usually there is coincidence of accent and stress, of quantity and time-value, at various points in the line.

In the example, " Deep in the shady sadness of a vale," each strand is a series of 10 syllables, accent reinforcing basic stress on the 4th, 6th and 10th. That is more than enough to ensure the perception of the metre when the line is in its context. But there are only four accents in speech, and as the natural tendency is to distribute them at fairly equal intervals of time, we get the sensation of a four-wave rhythm superimposed on a base of five. The unaccented syllables adapt themselves to the periods, as suggested above, and the outline becomes sufficiently regular to be represented as , or, allowing for the slight chanting which accompanies verse, a rhythm similar to that of the prose-sentence " Why do you always tell me to be still ? " Details can be shown more accurately by the graphical method, thus :



Compare the spoken form of :

(*a*) "Sat gray-hair'd Saturn, quiet as a stone."

(*b*) "Sorrow more beautiful than Beauty's self,"

where the movement is similar but the ten syllables are distributed differently.

(*a*)

(*b*)

As a contrast to those we have lines of seven waves :

"Speak ! roar ! shout ! yell ! ye sleepy Titans all,"

or the common three-period modulation, *e.g.* :

"The Heaven with its stars

(*a*) Look'd down on him with pity, and the voice

(*b*) Of Coelus, from the universal space,
Thus whisper'd."

(*a*)

(*b*)

I have no wish to weary the reader with diagrams: a few representative examples are enough to show how two homogeneous rhythms may be placed in opposition. Variations so regular in form produce a sensation not unlike that of Type III, so that it should be possible to select lines which resemble each other in physical outline and by reading them in succession set up a fixed-time base. By sacrificing the continuity of meaning for the purpose of our experiment, we may construct a stanza of blank verse modulations such as:

"To avarice or pride, their starry domes
Of diamond and of gold expand above . . .
Enamoured yet not daring for deep awe . . .
Beside a sparkling rivulet he stretched . . .
Of many-coloured woof and shifting hues . . .
The beating of her heart was heard to fill
The pauses of her music, and her breath
Tumultuously accorded with those fits,"

and thus suggest a rhythm of three quadruple waves—the timed movement which prevails in Francis Thompson's *Hound of Heaven*. *Cf.*:

"I fléd, Him, dòwn the níghts and dòwn the dáys;
4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 12 (13)
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
. . . . . .
I hid from Him, and under running laughter."

Rime only is required to complete the transformation. The physical rhythm, which is emphasised by this means, accompanies the lines when in their blank verse setting, but the attention is then centred on the five-stress base.

§ 4

There is no necessity that the spoken line should always form a homogeneous rhythm, for normal speech, as we saw from our glance at prose, is constantly changing from one rhythmical movement to another, and verse which is even partly of the nature of speech must reflect those changes. Found in conjunction with the principle of simultaneous opposition, and akin to it in purpose, is the device of grouping different wave-forms in sequence. Both devices serve to bring out the dissimilarity in things similar. Sequence-changes, however, though they occur with less frequency in verse, are more significant here than in prose, b cause the expected return of a measured unit sharpens the senses and gives more point to the variations.

The analysis of lines other than homogeneous depends on our ability to recognise the transition from duple to triple timing and vice versa. Complicated forms are for the most part elaborations of that simple difference. The following are given as examples of the transition occurring in successive waves. The figures indicate the nature of the sub-division, duple or triple, and where alternate readings are possible to me, I give both.

" Hoping to | still these | obstinate | questionings "
3 (4) | 2 | 3 (2) | 3

(*Alastor*, 26).

" Of | thee and | thine, by | forcing | some lone | ghost "
| 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 |

(*Alastor*, 27).

" Like an in | spired and | desperate | alchymist "
3 | 3 | 3 (2) | 3

(*Alastor*, 31).

"Thou hast un | veiled thy | inmost | sanctuary"
3 | 2 | 2 | 3

(*Alastor*, 38).

"As | if the | vanward | clouds of | evil | days"
| 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 |

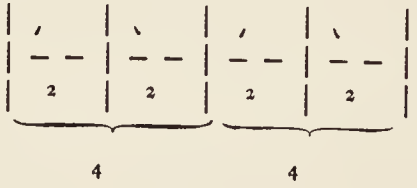
(*Hyperion*, 39).

"Some | mourning | words, | which in our | feeble |
| 2 | (2) | 3 | 2 |
tongue" (*Hyperion*, 49).

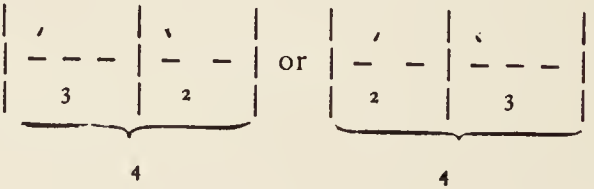
"Of | peaceful | sway a|bove man's | harvesting"
| 2 | 3 | 2 | 3

(*Hyperion*, 110).

In the same way, duple and triple movements may be compounded, when one group of syllables is subordinated to another by difference of accent. A sequence of four duple periods, for example, will take the form of two long quadruple waves if the main accent in the second and fourth periods is reduced. Thus:




But from time to time we find one half of the wave subdivided into three equal parts instead of two, as:



The following lines illustrate this variety of sequence-change :

| " Fréquent with crỳstal | column and clear | shrines "
| 3 2 | |
(*Alastor*, 93).

" Breathed o'er his dark fate | óne melòdious | sigh "
| 2 3 |
(*Alastor*, 59).

" In lonliest dell where | ódorous plànts en | twine "
| 3 2 (3) |
(*Alastor*, 146).

" As if the ebbing | aír had bùt one | wave "
| 3 2 |
(*Hyperion*, 78).

" Dream, and so dream all | níght withoùt a | stir "
| 3 2 |
(*Hyperion*, 75).

" Should | bé to àfter | tíme but èmpty | breath "
| 3 2 | 3 2 |
(*Morte d'Arthur*, 99).

" That | stóod on a dàrk | stráit of bàrren | land "
| 1½ ½ 1 | 3 2 |
3 2
(*Morte d'Arthur*, 10).

There is no need to multiply examples, which after all represent one possible interpretation of the physical rhythms. If those lines make clear what I mean by " combination in sequence " they have served their purpose.

In general, interchange of movements is in the nature of a passing variation, a departure from the normal line, but it may be used schematically. When the same change

occurs at a well-defined point in successive lines the ear begins to anticipate its recurrence. Thus in the longer lines of *Innisfree*, where the movement is mainly triple, an evenly-balanced duple wave stands out by contrast with the silence which follows, and becomes part of the scheme.

" I will arise and *go now*, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin *build there*, of clay and wattles made ;
Nine bean rows will I *have there*, a hive for the honey-bee."

But stanzas also are built up of lines differing in basic movement, as Professor Abercrombie has pointed out. Swinburne, to mention one instance only, took a peculiar delight in weaving divers threads into a stanzaic pattern, *e.g*, this from *Erechtheus* :

" For the heart was molten within her to hear, (Triple base)
And her knees beneath her were loosened for fear, (Triple base)
And her blood fast bound as a frost-bound water, (Duple)
And the soft new bloom of the green earth's daughter (Duple)
Wind-wasted as blossom of a tree ; (Quadruple)
As the wild God rapt from the earth's breast lifted (Duple)
On the strength of the stream of his dark breath drifted (Duple)
From the bosom of earth as a bride from the mother, (Triple)
With storm for bridesman and wreck for brother, (Triple)
As a cloud that he sheds upon the sea." (Quadruple)

Such structural changes, though normally they belong to fixed verse, are not unknown elsewhere. A simple homogeneous rhythm, sustained for more than a few periods in speech, tends to pass over to the base and give the impression of a duple or triple *pattern. Cf.* :

Duple—" His old right hand lay nerveless, listless, dead
— And diamond-paved lustrous long arcades."

Triple—" He spake, and ceas'd, the while a heavier threat
— Before the dawn in season due should blush."

The point is of minor importance : yet the mere statement of the fact helps to explain the great range of Type II, helps us to realise that with two simultaneous strands, each admitting combination in sequence, the possible number of variations is infinite.

## § 5

In practice, however, the range of possibilities is limited by the speech-habits of the race, and in the work of any one poet it is still further reduced by his instinctive preferences as to rhythmical sensation. Endless variety is bewildering and nothing more. The unity of rhythmic form which underlies a short poem or a section of a longer composition is obtained by the use of a limited number of typical modulations. A characteristic movement pervades the entire works of one poet though he employ the same patterns as a hundred others. Thus the sonorous dignity of Milton's blank verse is not to be confused with Browning's, however much we may disagree as to the exact rendering of the periods. Just as a dominant musical theme may run through a whole opera, so a poet may give unity to a passage by ringing the changes on one dominant speech-rhythm.

My analysis of the spoken line points to the conclusion that the forms employed in the utterance can be reduced

to a few well-defined types ; that the speech-variations of blank verse can be classified at least as easily as those of the alliterative line in Old English. The recurrence of typical forms might be attributed entirely to speech-habits peculiar to the experimenter were it not for the fact that many readers are conscious of the similarity and light upon the same lines when selecting " by ear " the rhythms most characteristic of a given writer. May we not assume then, that, to the poet, the spoken words conveyed something like the sensation we experience ?

The specimens I happened to select were from *Alastor*, Keats' *Hyperion*, Tennyson's *Morte d'Arthur*, and *Paradise Lost*, Book V, the first hundred lines being taken in each case. Any final classification must be based on a complete study of English verse, but those passages are sufficiently representative to serve as an illustration.

The primary distinctions are clear. Lines of five waves, those which have five effective accents in speech and thus approach the basic form, are set aside as Group I. The majority are isochronous rhythms of pure duple or triple movement or a sequence combination of the two. But there remains a great number of lines, some of four waves (Group II,) others of three (Group III), and a few less regular examples. Any piece of blank verse will exhibit those distinctions : the illustrations here are taken from *Paradise Lost*, Book V.

Group I :

" *With him I flew, and underneath beheld* (ll. 87–92)
*The earth outstretched immense, a prospect wide*
And various. Wondering at my flight and change
To this high exaltation, suddenly
*My guide was gone, and I, methought, sunk down,*
*And fell asleep ; but, oh, how glad I waked*
To find this but a dream."

It may be noted in passing that the five-wave utterance is most frequently used as a stabilising agent when the persistence of the base might be endangered by such variations as ll. 89–90 above.

Group II :

" Míld as when Zéphyrus on Flóra bréathes " (16)
" Wórks of day pást or mórrow's next desígn " (33)
" Such whíspering wáked her, but with stártled éye (26)
" Partáke thou álso : háppy though thou árt " (75)

Group III :

The examples from *Alastor*, given above in comparison with the *Hound of Heaven*, illustrate what is by far the commonest form of three-wave line. The type is no less common in Milton, *e.g.* :

" Hung óver her enámoured, and behéld " (13)
" To fínd thee I dirécted then my wálk " (49)
" That bróught me on a súdden to the trée (51)
" Much fáirer to my fáncy than by dáy " (53)

Since the number of waves is reduced, quadruple periods predominate in Groups II and III, and, as in fixed verse, the third part of the wave often bears a subsidiary or a strong accent. Both groups contain triple and mixed forms but so few in number and so variable in outline that they may be disregarded for the moment.

The full analysis of the passages selected would tax the reader's patience beyond all endurance, but my results can be tabulated briefly. Only in Group II is it necessary to make further distinctions. The typical modulations are as follows :

( ⌐ represents a unit of time-value, and ⌐ one twice as long. Those are merely relative values and subject to changes of tempo.)

Group II*a* includes all variations which approach the form :

*e.g.* :

"Breathed o'er his dark fate one melodious sigh" (*Al.*, 59).

"Still as the silence round about his lair" (*Hyp.*, 5).

"Watch what thou seest and lightly bring me word" (*M. d'A.*, 38).

"Here, happy creature, fair angelic Eve" (*P.L.*, 74).

Group II*b*—lines approaching

*e.g.* :

"Or good or lovely, which the sacred past" (*Al.*, 77).

"Those green-rob'd senators of mighty woods" (*Hyp.* 73).

"The goodliest fellowship of famous knights" (*M.d'A.*, 15).

"For gods, yet able to make gods of men" (*P.L.*, 70).

Group II*c* : forms like

*e.g.* :

"His cold fireside and alienated home" (*Al.*, 76).

"Sat gray-hair'd Saturn, quiet as a stone" (*Hyp.*, 4).

"That sparkled keen with frost against the hilt" (*M.d'A.*, 55).

"Heaven's last, best gift, my ever-new delight" (*P.L.*, 19).

Group II*d* : forms like

*e.g.* :

" He like her shadow has pursued, where'er " (*Al.*, 82).

" I have no comfort for thee, no not one " (*Hyp.*, 53).

" Lay a great water and the moon was full "
(*M.d'A.*, 12).

" Waking thou never wilt consent to do " (*P.L.*, 121).

Group III : The only distinct type here is of the form already given :

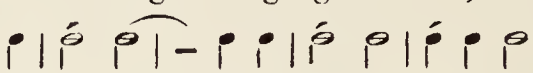
The figures below represent the number of examples in the passages chosen (100 lines each).

| | *Alastor* | *Hyperion.* | *M.d' Arthur.* | *Par. Lost.* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Group I. | | | | |
| 5 waves | 20 | 20 | 27 | 34 |
| Group II. | | | | |
| 4 waves *a.* | 8 | 18 | 13 | 7 |
| *b.* | 11 | 15 | 9 | 7 |
| *c.* | 12 | 10 | 8 | 12 |
| *d.* | 4 (50) | 9 (55) | 3 (41) | 2 (33) |
| Others | 15 | 3 | 8 | 5 |
| Group III. | | | | |
| 3 waves | 30 | 17 | 22 | 31 |
| Others | 0 | 2 | 9 | 2 |

The " others " in Groups II and III include miscellaneous types ; not necessarily of rare occurrence if we take blank verse as a whole. The percentage of such examples in *Alastor* (Group II) seems very high, but of the

fifteen lines, six (*viz.* ll. 6, 7, 60, 71, 83, 89) take the form

" And sólemn mídnight's tíngling sílentness," or its variant



" With súnsèt and its górgeous mínisters," and six more are sequence-combinations like

" Nór had that scéne of ámpler májesty."

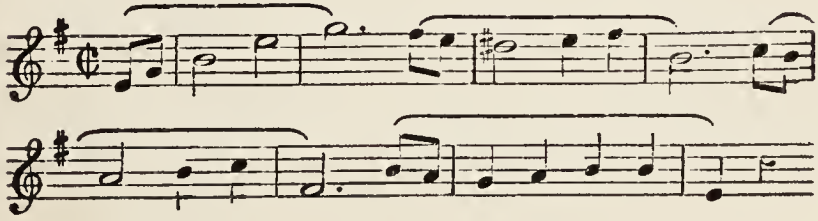
The figures indicate that in my reading of blank verse certain speech-patterns recur frequently, though at the time of reading I am not definitely aware of their presence. There is nothing haphazard about the modulations : the same outlines, returning time and again, force themselves on the ear quietly and unobtrusively, till the whole passage appears as one sustained complex movement. The unifying influence of a dominant type can be studied in the second paragraph of *Alastor* (ll. 18–49), or in the passage from *Paradise Lost*, where the three-wave variation occurs eleven times in the first twenty lines. Counting of heads is not an infallible guide, yet it does assist in defining relationships which have been vaguely apprehended. The general impression that Tennyson's verse resembles that of Keats, and that Shelley is more closely allied to Milton, is confirmed by the analysis.

§ 6

From the modulations of doubtful verse to the still greater freedom of Type I is but a step, marked outwardly by the disappearance of the " numbering principle." The physical rhythm of blank verse as we find it in the later Elizabethan dramatists, shows a growing tendency to depart

from the decasyllabic arrangement, till in the end it loses its distinctive character and passes beyond the "doubtful" class. We cease to count syllables : we feel simply that rhythmical phrases are distributed according to a repeating scheme.

That the phrases are still heard as rhythmical is proof that the ear remains cognisant of proportions within the larger unit, but those proportions are negligible so far as the pattern is concerned, for they are not definitely anticipated. Here more than ever the nature of our analysis will depend on the end we have in view. For the purpose of metre it is enough to indicate the waves and show without reference to their internal structure how the grouping is obtained. Detailed analysis of the sensation becomes necessary only when we aim at comparing our experience with that of others.

The order which the mind perceives in a normal speech-rhythm is first determined by meaning, the grouping of words according to grammatical and syntactical relationships, so that the nearer verse approaches to speech, as distinct from song, the more it relies upon balance of phrase rather than metrical periods to give the impression of order. Musical rhythm exhibits a similar combination of notes in thought-groups, and in both arts the phrase may cut across, without destroying the measuring unit. Thus, to take a simple parallel—although the introductory melody of Mozart's 4th Violin Sonata is "measured" in stress-time units, the sense-pauses fall somewhere in the middle of the bar, *e.g.* :

and the same overlapping of phrase and unit can be illustrated in language, allowance being made for the marked difference of tempo. Compare Mozart's form with the couplet :

"When the | lást stàr | fádes,
and the | dáwn from his | cáve
Like a | pále mìst de|scénds
on the | éver-dreaming | wáve."

The break between one phrase and another may lie anywhere within the wave but normally it occurs in the second half and is marked by a perceptible silence, the cæsura. The pause is not essential however. Sense-grouping is effective even when there is no audible break in the stream of sound, *e.g.*, the line

"Lest one good custom | should corrupt the world."

The use of the cæsura to divide the spoken line into two balanced phrases is but one instance of the natural tendency toward binary division which reveals itself in sound-rhythm generally, and which is explained by most theorists as arising from the bi-lateral structure of the human body and consequent movement of alternate limbs. Whether for this or another reason, rhythmical movements do group themselves in pairs. One portion of the structure is felt to counterbalance the other, though the phrases need not be and indeed seldom are identical in detail. This principle was the basis of the earliest metre in the language and to the present day it remains as the chief foundation of verse in which the speech-quality predominates. Thus the original speech-rhythms of the race retain their characteristic form even when super-imposed on various equal-beat measures which have been borrowed from foreign sources.

Considered from this point-of-view, the blank verse line is of peculiar interest.

The half-line is no longer a syntactical unit—the need for such a unit grows less as the pattern becomes more prominent—yet in practice we tend to phrase blank verse in accordance with our instinctive demand for binary form. Instead of:

"The old órder chángeth, yíelding pláce to néw
And Gód fulfíls Himsélf in mány wáys
Lest óne good cústom shóuld corrúpt the wórld"

we read:

"The óld order chángeth, | yielding pláce to néw
And Gód fulfíls Himself | in mány wáys
Lest óne good cústom | should corrúpt the wórld."

In the decasyllabic line, as spoken, the four-wave form occurs more frequently than any other. Group II lines are common enough even in Heroic Couplet, and our short analysis of blank verse shows 179 examples of this type as against 101 of Group I. Such verses lend themselves naturally to phrasing in groups of two accents, with the result that the original speech-forms of the language are retained. There are paragraphs of blank verse in which the accentual sequences are those of Old English and the types A, B, C, D, E, postulated for the alliterative line can be applied with scarcely any alteration. The following passage from Wordsworth's *Michael* requires little comment.

Type B.

× ′ × ′ ×

"Shall not go from us,

The land

Type E. or B.

′ × ′ × ′
× × ′ × ′

and it shall be free.

Type A. Type E2.

He shall possess it, free as is the wind

Type A. Type B.

That passes over it. We have thou know'st

Type C. Type (A).

Another kinsman—He will be our friend

Type B. Type B.

In this distress. He is a prosperous man."

(ll, 245–9).

Or this from *Tintern Abbey* :

"'mid the din
Of tówns and cities, I have ówed to thém,
In hóurs of wéariness, sensátions swéet,
Félt in the blóod, and félt along the héart ;
And pássing éven into my púrer mínd,
With tránquil restorátion : féelings tóo
Of únremembered pléasure : súch, perháps,
As hàve no slíght or trívial influence
On thát bèst pórtion of a góod màn's lífe,
His líttle, námeless, únremèmbered, ácts
Of kíndness and of lóve."

(ll, 26–35).

Compare with that a passage from *Morte d'Arthur* (ll, 28–32).

"For thou remémberest hów

Type B. Type E1.

In those old days, one summer noon an arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake (Group III).

Type E2. Type A.

Clothed in white samite—mystic, wonderful

Type (A). Type B.

Holding the sword—and how I rowed across."

Or Shelley (*Alastor* ll, 75–79).

"When early youth had passed he left.

Type B. Type B.

His cold fireside and alienated home

Type B. Type B.

To seek strange truths in undiscovered lands.

Type E2. Type A.

Many a wide waste and tangled wilderness

Has lured his fearless steps."

This is by no means the only form of balance employed, nor do the examples follow each other in unbroken succession, yet even in Group I, binary division is preserved as a rule. The five waves are arranged in phrases of two and three accents (2 + 3 or 3 + 2), the longer of which may be compared to the "lengthened" hemistich of Old English, *e.g.* :

"Or where the gorgeous East | with richest hand
Showers on her kings | barbaric pearl and gold."

Balance of phrase within the verse is so common that one writer describes the five-foot line, in its abstract architecture, as "a large five-beat musical measure which is compounded of a two-beat element and a three-beat element."[19]

[19] Sidney Grew. Op. cit., p. 15.

There are, of course, lines of which the two parts are decidedly unequal, and that for a variety of reasons, but when there is a definite departure from balanced structure equilibrium is usually restored by a disturbance in the opposite direction, as in *Michael*, ll. 256–7 :

> " And Isabel sat silent, | for her mind
> Was busy, | looking back into past times "

or ll. 262–3 :

> " A basket, | which they filled with pedlar's wares ;
> And, with his basket on his arm, | the lad
> Went up to London."

It is not uncommon also, to find an unbroken phrase occupying the whole line, particularly in the three-wave lines of Group III : and perhaps it is worth noting here, that in the passages I have examined, those lines occur either in pairs consecutively or in close proximity, so that the balance of the whole is maintained.

Considerations such as these tempt me to suggest that blank verse presents the maximum definition of ideal scheme compatible with the preservation of the speech-forms most natural to English. It would seem, in theory, that any " numbered base " might be treated in the same way, yet none has proved equally suitable. Shorter lines, from the octosyllabic downwards, offer less scope for variation, and long lines, tending to exceed both the span of attention and the normal breath-group, become disintegrated. This, of course, is but a suggestion in passing : it is more to the purpose to note that the history of blank verse from Marlowe to Shirley and Ford, illustrates roughly the stages intervening between " doubtful " and " variable " structure,—the growing importance of the prose-phrase as an element in verse-form.

§ 7

Other metres, especially since the time of Coleridge, have attained far greater freedom of movement. As a rule, however, the speech quality has been gained at the expense of structural detail. In the type of verse which is sometimes described as "accentual" the numbering principle is no longer evident, nor are time relationships clearly perceived. The single-wave unit is replaced by what I have called the group-unit, the line or half-line ; and although the waves within the group may be fairly homogeneous, they are in no sense "fixed." Even the natural tendency towards isochronous distribution is obscured by constant change in tempo, in the amount of syllabic material and in the arrangement of accentual values. The proportions immediately perceived are those of the major architecture rather than the minutiæ of the scheme. Thus, instead of metrical order embodied in language, we have natural speech which contrives to give the sensation of metre.

So far as major rhythms are concerned, balance and symmetry depend on the simplest laws of proportion, and from time to time the same general structures reappear in slightly different guise. Possible exceptions to those laws, such as we find in the Ode, have always been in the nature of isolated experiments and not always an unqualified success. Even the comparatively irregular metres, so common in modern English, are for the most part freer versions of patterns already familiar, and illustrate quite as well the essential simplicity of general design.

But there is no need to labour the point : it is obvious that the detailed treatment of the group-unit may vary almost indefinitely. Sometimes the whole gamut of rhythm, from song to speech, may be exhibited within one verse-form ; especially if the metre be of popular

origin and relatively free from the influence of academic theory. Thus the ballad may range between a regular jog-trot and a freely modulated line scarcely to be distinguished from prose. Ballad Metre consists in its main outline of a series of four-wave units which are first divided off in pairs—usually by means of a silent wave at the end of each alternate unit—and then with the help of rime are combined in fours to produce a simple stanza. If ⏑ = *any* wave, this may be represented diagrammatically as :

Employed in conjunction with a regular "numbered" base, the scheme yields a movement like :

"The gallant greyhounds swiftly ran, to chase the fallow deere ;
On Munday they began to hunt, ere daylight did appeare,"

but handled with more freedom the same stanzaic pattern gives us lines such as :

"Will ze gae to the ew-bughts, Marion,
And wear in the sheip wi' mee ?
The sun shines sweit, my Marion,
But nae half sae sweit as thee."

or, going a step further :

"Early in the mornynge the justice uprose,
To the gates fast can he gone,
And commaunded to be shut full close
Lightile everychone."

My business here, however, is not to discuss the ballad but to point out that in more recent times the same general plan has been used with a base that is frankly "variable"

to produce a great variety of effects, most of them quite unlike anything we would describe as "ballad-metre." For example, our diagram would represent equally well the form of Mr. De la Mare's *The Listeners* :

"'Is there ánybody thére?" said the Tráveller, (′)
Knócking on the móonlit dóor; (′)
And his hórse in the sílence chámped the grásses
Of the fórest's férny flóor. (′)

where the effective unit is a group of four waves, though most lines (29 of the 36, in my reading) contain only three accents of the first magnitude.

Here the writer employs a fairly homogeneous and almost isochronous rhythm, and that without limiting himself to any fixed wave-form or calling special attention to the internal structure of the line. The regularity of the metre when examined in detail is somewhat surprising, since the poem as a whole gives the impression of untrammelled ease, a freedom akin to that of natural speech, which marks off such verse as distinct from the types already considered. But the subtle balance of major rhythms must not lead us to the hasty conclusion that the group-units are of equal duration, as Macdonagh suggested, nor that they bear the same total "weight" of accent, as others have said. The relationship between the detailed and the general structure can best be shown by a closer study of a few lines. Let us take the stanza :

1. "Néver the least stír made the lísteners, (′)
2. Though évery wórd he spáke (′)
3. Fell échoing through the shádowiness of the stíll hòuse (′)
4. From the óne man léft awáke." (′)

(Line 3 may also be rendered :

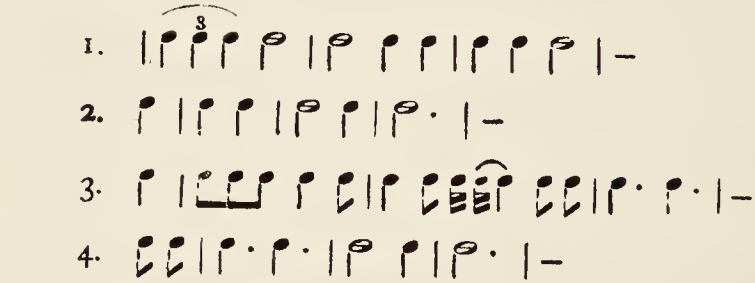
"Fell échoing through the | shádowiness | óf the stìll | hóuse.")

The "equal-time" theory is shaken by a comparison of lines 1 and 3 ; whatever allowance one may make for pauses in speech, the lines are not, nor do they appear to be isochronous. *Cf.* :

"But only a host of phantom listeners
Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair."

Within the line also the waves are frequently unequal in length, *e.g.*, "Though | évery | wórd he | spake" or "And how the | sílence sùrged | sóftly | backward," in which the proportions are approximately 2 : 3 and 3 : 2. Exact representation by means of musical symbols is therefore impossible : still, in order to save space, we may analyse the given stanza with a fair degree of accuracy thus :

The schematic unit  when translated into sound becomes



Here we find all the peculiarities usually associated with speech-rhythm ; great variety in the sub-division of the waves, unequal time-periods, and free interchange of movement (triple, duple and quadruple), which, taken together, give this verse its marked "speech-quality." The importance of natural phrasing, however, must not be

exaggerated. It is true that the details of sound-distribution are largely fixed by normal language and not adjusted to meet the demands of an insistent pattern, as may be seen by comparing the spoken modulations of any single wave in the group. The second wave, for example, appears in shapes as varied as :

" But only a *host of* phantom listeners
Stood thronging the faint *moonbeams on the* dark stair
Fell echoing through the *shadowiness of the* still house."

On the other hand, I would not have it thought that the form depends on semantic values alone. An arrangement of sounds which is in any sense metrical makes possible a distinction between the phrase (semantic group) and the measuring unit. Grammatical and syntactical divisions need not coincide with the longer unit any more than with the shorter, yet the architecture of the phrase is clearly more important here than elsewhere. As it happens, all the phrases of the given stanza fall within the metrical group : the whole poem, indeed, yields only three unmistakable examples of run-on lines (ll. 3–4, 10–11, 25–26) which are the more conspicuous because of their rarity. The last is especially noteworthy, being a good illustration of unequal balance, in which equilibrium is maintained by isolating one wave of each group and inverting the order :

" For he súddenly smóte on the dóor, | éven
Lóuder, | and lífted his héad : "

It will be seen that by transferring the word *even* to the second line the balance can be altered without any vital change of metre.

Thomas Hardy's little poem, *Afterwards*, although not pre-eminently variable in structure, furnishes useful examples of this overlapping and serves also to show in a simple way how major and minor rhythms are interwoven.

The hovering uncertainty of its movement, flowing smoothly at one moment, ruffled by cross-currents at another, may either delight or puzzle the reader according to his sense of rhythm. The general scheme is seen in the first two stanzas :

"When the Présent has látched its póstern... behínd my trémulous stáy, |
And the Máy month fláps its glád green léaves like wíngs" |

or

"If it bé in the dúsk whén,... like an éyelid's sóundless blínk, |
The déwfall-háwk comes cróssing the shádes to alíght" |

Longer lines, having a metrical break in the middle, alternate with shorter, unbroken lines which are followed by a well-marked pause. But the next two stanzas begin with phrases that run on beyond the medial break and so produce a double form. The words are heard as the equivalent of the symmetrical scheme ⏜ – ⏜ – and yet, because of their grammatical connection, they arrange themselves in phrases which have a balance of their own : the ratio of the first to the second, whether we consider the total duration or merely the interval between the main accents, is almost exactly as 2 : 1. *e.g.* :

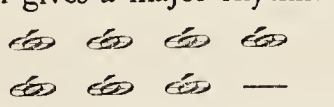
"If I pass during some nocturnal... blackness, | mothy and warm |
If, when hearing that I have been stilled... at last, | they stand at the door." |

More important still is the minor grouping revealed by further analysis. It is to be noted that the prominent points of the spoken line are not equally prominent, but vary according to a scheme, as follows :

"When the Présent has làtched its póstern... behínd
my trèmulous stáy,
And the Máy month flàps its glád green lèaves like
wíngs."

Thus taking the position of accents and pauses into account, and remembering how easily the mind puts its own value on a period of silence, we get a minor system of four-wave groups (not three waves, as might be expected) :

and that in its turn gives a major rhythm :



which is a repetition on a larger scale of the minor.

It is not suggested that such symmetry is characteristic of normal speech. This metre, as I have said, is too regular to be a good example of Type I. The illustration is intended chiefly as an introduction to more complicated systems of balance, under which heading I place pieces like Laurence Binyon's *For the Fallen*, Harold Monro's *Children of Love*, and Fredegond Shove's *The New Ghost*,—to name a few only at random. The last of those can be taken as fairly typical of the group, and its first stanza is as suitable as any for our purpose.

1. "And he cást it dòwn, dówn, on the gréen gráss,
2. Óver the yòung crócuses, where the déw wás—
3. He càst the gárment of his flésh that was fùll of déath,
4. And like a swórd his spìrit shówed oùt of the cóld
shéath."

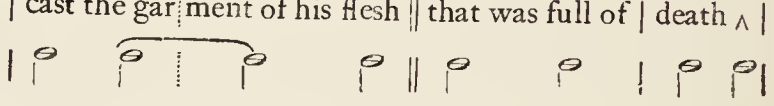
This is the kind of thing I have described as natural language which gives the sensation of metre. One might argue that it is nothing more than a somewhat unconventional

treatment of the common seven-period line, and so it is, in theory ; yet the freedom is such that, to the unprejudiced reader, detailed pattern is scarcely perceptible. For practical purposes the lines are composed of two phrases, each bearing two main accents which are felt, in a vague way, to be part of an ordered sequence, the chief sign of that order being the distribution of the accents. Meaning and sound are so combined that the crests of the spoken line occur at proportionate intervals of time. In this stanza the space between the accents of the first phrase is approximately double that of the second, and though we take no particular notice of timing we are aware that the phrases are rhythmically related. The repetition of similar major rhythms is sufficient to supply the mind with the pattern which it demands of metre, and meanwhile the senses react spontaneously to the minor grouping. That will vary slightly with different readers ; my rendering is something like :

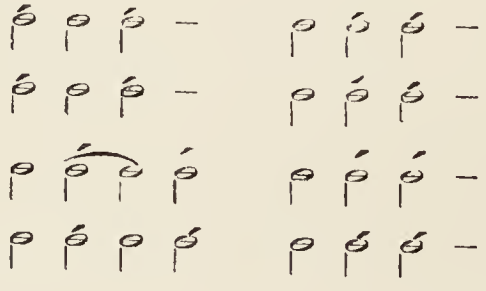
And he | cast it down, | down, ∧ ‖ ∧ on the green | grass ∧ |

or line 3 :

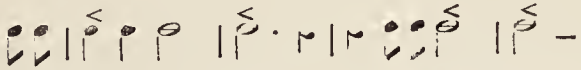
He | cast the gar|ment of his flesh ‖ that was full of | death ∧ |



Hence the general scheme of the stanza is :



Further dissection is unnecessary, unless it be to demonstrate in detail one method of reading or to emphasise still more the variations of wave-form. The latter hardly requires emphasis, but those who are interested in the former may wish to have a fuller explanation, *e.g.* :

1. 

2.

3.

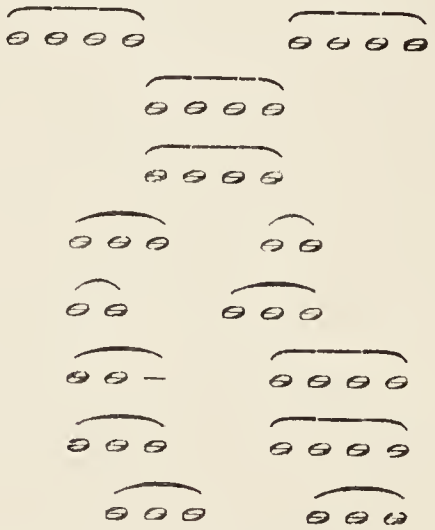
4.

Verse of this species goes as far towards prose-form as the retention of the metrical principle will allow. Another step brings us back to non-metrical verse in which semantic grouping is the chief factor and rhythm almost entirely a matter of sensation. The balance of phrase is slightly more obvious than in prose, the general structure more symmetrical, but neither a single-wave unit nor a definite group-unit is presented to the mind. A certain æsthetic pleasure is always to be derived from the perception of order : here, however, the satisfaction is not that of beholding the skilful execution of an anticipated plan. It is rather the joy of the spectator who watches the building grow, knowing nothing of the plan but delighted to see that each stone is designed for its position and adds to the comeliness of the whole.

With the return to non-metrical verse we have completed the cycle begun by the study of pattern, and the present chapter may be rounded off by one example from Walt Whitman :

"I thínk I could túrn and líve with ánimals, thèy are so plácid and sèlf-contáin'd ;
I stánd and lóok at them lóng and lóng.
They dò not swéat and whíne about their condítion ;
They dò not lie awáke in the dárk and wéep for their síns ;
They dò not make me sick discússing their dúty to Gód ;
Not óne is dissátisfied—not óne is deménted with the mánia of ówning things ;
Not óne knéels to anóther, nòr to his kínd that lived thóusands of yéars ago ;
Not óne is respéctable or indústrious òver the whóle eárth."

The effective base can be shown thus :



We are at once aware of a deliberate ordering of the parts, a delicately balanced rhythm, too regular for prose yet lacking the definite pattern of metre.

. . . . .

The foregoing chapters are based on a few beliefs which can now be stated briefly by way of recapitulation. The more important are :

(1) That the essential factors of a sound-rhythm are duration and ideal stress.

(2) That natural rhythmical divisions, limited by the conditions of sound-production and by the span of attention, are to be distinguished from conventional systems of measurement.

(3) That measurement is not to be confused with description of movement. Terms like *rising* and *falling* metre are purely descriptive.

(4) That the two-fold appeal of rhythm, to the mind and to the senses, can be employed as a basis for classification.

(5) That verse is distinguished from prose by prominence of pattern.

(6) That the physical and the ideal rhythms arising from the same sequence of sounds may be completely different.

(7) That the detailed structure of the physical rhythm depends on individual interpretation.

# FURTHER PROBLEMS.
# THE HISTORY OF MUSIC AND VERSE.

## § 1

THE following pages contain much that is purely tentative. Fragmentary knowledge, such as we possess on the subject of rhythm, does not warrant us in assuming a dogmatic air, and in any case the main interest of a living science lies in its speculations and hypotheses. But in order to render speculations intelligible some preliminary definition of terms and classification of material had to be attempted, and for that reason several problems arising out of the earlier chapters have been deferred until now. Historical questions, in particular, have been avoided, not because they are negligible or uninteresting, but because, as a result of the emphasis here laid upon the subjective element in rhythm, those questions are bound up with a much wider discussion as to the origin and development of the "rhythmical sense." A history from this point of view does not consist of a tabulated list of musical and verse-forms in the order of their appearance. Continuity is to be discovered only when we know something of the forces which act for and against rhythmical development: we must consider how far the sense itself is capable of change, before we talk glibly of this and that foreign influence.

Very little is definitely known of the origin of rhythmical experience. The key to the mystery has been sought in the beating of the heart, the expansion of the lungs, the alternate fatigue and activity of the nerve-centres, and the periodic nature of attention—matters which may be safely left to the pure scientist—but to the student of art the most interesting view is that which suggests a connection between physical movement and the sense of organised time. We are all more or less clearly aware of the connection. A strong,

insistent rhythm produces involuntary muscular contractions, and though we have schooled ourselves to suppress the hand-clapping and stamping of feet which man in his less civilised states regards as the natural accompaniment of the experience, yet in our unguarded moments, when we surrender to the magic of beautiful sound, the body is liable to revert to its old habits, and we awake to find a foot swinging pendulum-fashion or a finger tapping the page. "We are still flagellates at heart"[30] in spite of our endeavours to cultivate a mind above simple "heel-rhythm." The experience is inseparably bound up with the sense of muscular activity and produces an exhilaration not unlike that of physical exercise: hence the suggestion that all our notions of balance, order and symmetry in the forms of art are founded ultimately on the free use of the limbs.

M. Dalcroze, who has made this branch of the subject his special province, asserts boldly that "all the rhythmic elements in music were originally formed after the rhythms of the human body; but in course of time the types and their combinations were varied and multiplied to the point of spiritualising music, and their muscular origin was eventually lost sight of."[31] There can be no doubt that the response to music and verse on the dynamic side is enormously strengthened by studying their simpler proportions "in terms of" physical movement; that is to say, by renewing the primitive association between poetry, music and dancing. It is significant that "the most gifted of all artistic peoples from the rhythmic point of view—the Greeks—designated the rhythmic unit by the term 'foot,' which usage has passed into most modern languages:"[32] and it is worth remembering also that the

[30] Dr. G. P. Bidder in his address to the British Association. 1927.

[31] and [32] M. Dacroze. Op. cit., pp. 199 and 130.

Greeks laid great stress on gymnastic training, that they were familiar not only with the sight of the human body in motion but with the sensation of controlled limb-movement.

To-day no less than in former ages the pure feeling for rhythm is most highly developed among those peoples who are accustomed to a life of free and natural bodily activity. Half-savage tribes in Africa and South America display practical skill far exceeding that of the average European ; and it has been argued that modern civilisation with its offices, factories and the like, has brought about a steady deterioration of rhythmic sensibility among the more "advanced" nations. Sedentary occupations, industries which necessitate restricted and constantly repeated movements, certainly tend to impede development, but no sufficient reason has been given for regarding that as the sole, or even the most important cause of deterioration. Other factors will be mentioned when we come to deal with the decay of metrical forms.

Evidence of doubtful value is provided by what one may call racial rhythms—characteristic forms which appear throughout the folk-song and native dance music of various countries. The springing tread of the mountaineer, the alternate lift and poise as distinct from the balanced stride of the plains, has been suggested as the basis of those melodies —Scottish or Norwegian, for example—in which the beat-unit is commonly sub-divided as or . The vaulting rhythm of a Strathspey presents a striking contrast to the smoothness of the saraband or gavotte, and to the rapid yet regular movement of the bourré, bolero, tarantella or English hornpipe. Or if modern illustrations be preferred, the dances of the hill-folk can be contrasted with popular measures of to-day, "flat-foot" Negro

rhythms reminiscent of plantations and swamps where progress is slow and each foot is extricated from the soft ground by bending the knee. We need not pursue the subject here : the general connection between music and action is clear in such cases.

With poetry the relationship is not so evident. Speech-rhythm is rapid and elusive : and we have long ago ceased to scan our verses by physical movement. Traces remain, however—metrical formulæ which, *mutatis mutandis*, correspond to national dance-measures. It does not take a very fine ear to detect a radical difference between the structures of French and English verse for example. There is a smoothness and regularity about southern forms which has no counterpart in the rugged accentual outline of Teutonic languages : and a shorter group takes the place of the ten or eleven-syllable phrase so common in English. M. Henri Bremond, pointing out that Joubert's prose is made up chiefly of octosyllabic verses, adds the note : "Soit que nous respirions, soit que nous marchions, ou même et surtout que nous sentions, pensions et voulions, si j'ose m'exprimer ainsi, nous obeissons tous plus ou moins, et presque toujours sans nous en douter, à un certain rhythme assez uniforme," and goes on to remark that for French people the octosyllable is the most flexible and most characteristic form, "l'image la plus vraie du génie de notre nation."[33]

I have heard soldiers who had fought in Flanders give a practical demonstration of the rhythm and melody peculiar to the foreign tongue. Men who knew but a few words of French, and possessed a quick ear, could mimic to the life the delivery of an oration in that language, using for

[33] *Les Deux Musiques de la Prose.* Henry Bremond. (1924). p. 47.

the purpose meaningless syllables which bore very little resemblance phonetically to the sounds of the original. The existence of such differences, of course, is no proof of their muscular origin. Here as in music the facts admit of several explanations, but the first step towards solution is to recognise such forms when they appear.

The discovery of some resemblance, however general, between the physical activity of a people and its art-forms at once prompts us to ask how far the rhythms which a man feels to be easy and natural correspond with individual peculiarities of gait and gesture. We know that stereotyped motions like rowing, spinning, swinging a hammer or rocking a cradle, beget appropriate musical accompaniment and we are prepared to find a family resemblance among all the spinning-songs and all the cradle-songs of the world : but is there not also a more intimate connection between singer and song ? Each performer treats the rhythmical detail in his own way and it is conceivable that the finer modifications are linked up with his habitual method of executing the movement. I have noticed more than once that a student who has a marked peculiarity in his manner of walking, a slow, ponderous tread or a light rapid step, shows a similar tendency in the distribution of accents when he finds a congenial topic and writes with easy fluency. This may be mere coincidence—the one example in a thousand ; yet on closer scrutiny the suggestion will appear less fantastic than it seems at first sight. Professor Sievers, I believe, goes much further and deduces details of the writer's character as well as gesture from the " melodic curve " of his language.

This view of the origin of rhythm has considerable bearing on the historical problems of metre. The conclusions it offers are useful so long as they do not blind us to the existence of other possibilities : but in our dealings

with theories let us recollect, with William Clissold, " that a man wedded to a system . . . can at last discover his system at the merest hint of evidence, and all that does not countenance it ceases to interest him, ceases to exist for him."[34]

§ 2

We are on surer ground when we turn from the question of origin to that of development, and begin to study the growth of rhythmical consciousness in the individual, the methods by which natural proclivities are modified and the range of experience is extended. Skill has been roughly defined above as the power to combine simultaneously and in sequence a variety of rhythms, and our aim now is to discover how that power is acquired.

Recollections of childhood and observation of very young children lead us to conclude that in the beginning rhythm is entirely a matter of sensation. The baby beating a tattoo with his heels or the small boy marching round to the accompaniment of his drum derives from the activity a pleasure that is purely physical. Before long he essays composition in his small way, weaving a kind of primitive incantation from scraps of his ordinary speech : he hears music too, nursery-rimes perhaps, and begins to beat out those new patterns. Thus the process of mastering more complicated arrangements and variations of those already familiar goes on in close association with the sense of motion.

Not till much later, if at all, does the child perceive a relationship between the parts of the structure and become interested in systematic analysis. Immediately he does so, however, the nature of the experience begins to change : separation of the auditory from the muscular element

[34] *The World of William Clissold.* H. G. Wells. Vol. I, p. 178.

becomes possible, for the mind takes a more active part in shaping the experience. Knowledge ceases to be purely empirical ; the acquisition and invention of new forms is no longer a matter of trial and error. It is important to note the change, for the immediate result of this intellectual approach is a return to simple straightforward patterns, an apparent loss rather than increase of skill. Those who have tried to master the art of motion by a scientific study of principles, as in dancing and various forms of sport, know how difficult it is to analyse and control simple movements, such as have been performed with ease a thousand times before. The same difficulty confronts us in our first efforts to gain a rational as distinct from a purely empirical mastery of sound-rhythms. The rationalising process has a cramping influence and may lead to permanent limitation of the sense, with the result that those forms only which are based upon or can be adapted to simple patterns are accepted as rhythmical. There is no doubt that the study of prosody, as it is still carried on in many schools, can be a positive disadvantage to young pupils. Development is arrested at this stage and the children never regain their former freedom.

As a rule the restriction of freedom is a passing phase. Most people follow up the discovery, combining and elaborating the schematic elements and bringing within rational control an ever-increasing body of sensation. It may be that the process, carried far enough, alters the experience completely. Mr. Thomson's "head-rhythm" seems to lie beyond the region of sensation in a world of mathematical abstractions with which I am not at present concerned.

My observations point to the conclusion that the full development of the rhythmical sense consists of four phases :

(1) a period of empirical discovery and direct imitation,
(2) a creative period when rhythmical sensation is elaborated in practice,
(3) a rationalising period with consequent simplification,
(4) the elaboration of "form:" the endeavour to combine the maximum appeal to sense with the greatest intellectual pleasure.

"Full" development, as used here, means simply the complete cycle of growth so far as we know it. The process goes on indefinitely. Easier rhythms are rationalised at an early stage, the more complex remain as pure sensations long after we have become familiar with the idea of pattern. Performance, therefore, is always in advance of analysis: the general line of progress is from sensation toward perception. This, in spite of the fact that intellectual control provides a means of working from the abstract to the concrete, so to speak; of building up physical rhythms in accordance with new schemes and thereby reversing the normal process. Any such reversal however, must be of short duration and pre-supposes scientific knowledge.

While we are on the subject it is convenient to notice that the intellectual approach to rhythm has yet another value. Not only is it a source of pleasure in itself and a means of increasing our scope: it is also an aid to memory, facilitates the recollection of patterns which have faded through disuse and renders a form proof to some extent against the ravages of time,—a point to be remembered in discussing the history of metre. That some patterns become unfamiliar and unwieldy if not kept in use will be readily allowed. The musician who resumes the practice of his art after a long period of inactivity finds himself hampered, not by the loss of executive power only but by

a certain difficulty in recapturing the "feel" of the more delicate phrases. And that has been my experience with verse also: unaccountable difficulties appeared, lines which had been smooth and easy before suddenly became awkward and halting: for in this as in other arts constant exercise is the surest means toward practical skill. The "fading out" is most evident of course, with acquired rhythms—forms taken over ready-made from some outside source and especially those which have not developed beyond the second phase.

§ 3

"But there are different manifestations of rhythm," it may be said, "Are we to understand that practice in one art, dancing, music or poetry, makes for greater skill in the others?" A nice problem and entirely relevant to our subject. We know that those arts had a common origin and early history. They have diverged widely since then, however. Each has evolved its own technique, with the result that, in this age of specialisation we tend to treat them apart and are too prone to exaggerate differences. Musical systems of prosody have certainly done harm by ignoring the distinction between speech and song but the fault is on the whole less grievous than that of the prosodists who take no notice of the fundamental resemblance. The ability to group sense-impressions in time is required for all three types of rhythm, though the medium in each case demands its own special forms.

The ear for music, we are told, is not the same as the ear for verse; great poets have often been singularly insensible to the beauties of the sister art. Surely this is not surprising when "ear" in the former instance refers chiefly to the appreciation of pitch-relationships within

recognised diatonic scales, a thing quite distinct from the feeling for rhythm or for vowel-quality. It is no secret that many people who like to be called musical are sadly deficient in the matter of phrasing, just as there are verse-lovers who possess no ear for tune. We need not on that account lose patience at the mere mention of the word music, and thus shut out what light the comparative study may yield. Even in the business of practical analysis music with its definite time-divisions and relatively slow pace is a valuable aid to the understanding of the rapid and somewhat uncertain movement of speech.

However difficult it may be to reconcile different terminologies and scales of measurement, there is no reason to doubt that practice in one branch of rhythm facilitates the development of skill in another. The reader can probably find in his own circle of friends a dozen people who are highly skilled in all three arts—provided always that the proficiency sought for is in rhythm, not pitch or harmony on one hand, and athletic or gymnastic feats on the other. And the history of sound-rhythm, taken as a whole, points to the same conclusion.

The dance by its very nature leaves little in the way of permanent record, but from the historical comparison of music and verse we may still satisfy ourselves that the relationship is much closer than is generally supposed. Of influences in the wider sense we need not speak here. Some poets have found inspiration in music, and more frequently still musicians like Schumann, Grieg, and the later Russians, have responded to poetry, but let us confine our attention to the parallel developments in musical and poetic form. This we may do safely without going to extremes and stating, with Miss Dabney, that the two arts have always risen and fallen together.

Written music, as we know it,—that is to say, "rationalised" music, for there is no current language of sound—is of fairly recent growth. Towards the end of the twelfth century Franco of Cologne introduced a system by which the duration of notes could be represented graphically. Compositions were still unbarred, however—the rhythm within the phrase being indicated by the normal accent of the words to be sung—and not till the early seventeenth century, when instrumental music had established its right to separate treatment, did anything approaching our modern "time-system" come into general use. The church, in whose service the new art was chiefly cultivated, attached more importance to words than to melody: and perhaps this is always true of the early stages, for folk-songs also, though they often employ meaningless refrains, are largely narrative or descriptive. Even to-day it may be said of the surviving remnants of folk-song that matter rather than tune is the first consideration. In the early church this state of affairs did not last long. When it had been discovered that several melodies could be sung together with pleasing effect, music at once began to assert its independence. Composers, following their own interests, devoted themselves to the perfection of the contrapuntal or polyphonic style and forgot the religious purpose: so that by the year 1545 the Council of Trent found it necessary to issue an edict condemning elaborate musical settings and recommending the principle of one note to each syllable of the text. The ecclesiastical authorities had good reason for intervening. Many of the masses of the period must have been unintelligible even to a congregation familiar with the liturgy for the voice-parts, alto, tenor, bass, might be set to entirely different words. Sacred and secular texts were mingled with unblushing profanity and contrapuntal

variations on popular tunes occurred at the most solemn moments of the service.

Those facts in themselves are nothing to us, but they serve to show what was happening in music just before the age of Elizabeth ; to remind us that worshippers in the cathedrals and large churches of England listened to masses and motets in which different melodies were woven together simultaneously. Nor are the melodies as such our chief concern. Rhythmic counterpoint was an earlier development than melodic, and according to the historians, the mensural system itself " grew out of the necessity of bringing the poetic metres, which at first formed the only rule of measure, to a common proportion."[35] My point is that the listeners were accustomed to follow separate lines of impressions and to superimpose one form on another.

Polyphony was above all an art built on contrast. " Though the several parts must agree, their agreement is not the chief point, but rather their differences both of melody and rhythm."[36] And rhythm at the time of which we speak was still dependent on language, with its inevitable margin of freedom as to interpretation. Early music, therefore, promoted the development of the " feeling " for rhythm : the skill which it required was skill in practice, and its achievement in this direction corresponds to what I have called the second phase of growth.

This conclusion at once links itself up to my impression of the age as a whole, and I find myself wondering how far the national character may have combined with the spirit of the times to make English composers pre-eminent in polyphonic music. The age was certainly practical.

[35] *The Oxford History of Music*. Vol. I, p. 121.

[36] *The Growth of Music*, by H. C. Colles. Part I, p. 13.

Under Elizabeth men were interested first and always in doing things. Courtiers, seamen, poets, and dramatists, were intent on producing results and did not concern themselves greatly with rules and regulations. They had some theories—mostly borrowed from Italy and France—but only such as were strictly necessary to the work in hand. " I too will something make and joy in the making " would be a fitting motto for the literature of the time with its poetic exercises, long sonnet sequences, and sheer delight in high-sounding phrases. There is something almost childlike in the Elizabethan love of conjuring with fine words, as seen in the Euphuistic fashion and the pompous rhetoric of Marlowe. Shakespeare also, though he satirises the excesses, is not above sharing in the delight : and the very essence of romantic drama is its boyish exuberance, its readiness to defy precedent and " catch the nearest way."

The history of prosody tells the same tale. Works on metre are surprisingly few in number considering the richness and variety of the performance in verse, and the writers who do touch the subject are concerned chiefly with practical hints for the craftsman. Beyond this we find only a few unsuccessful attempts to reconcile English usage with classical theory. Thus music and verse were in much the same position as regards their dependence on practical skill : but we have still to discover whether there was any real affinity of structure between the two and whether the knowledge of music was sufficiently widespread to affect the general conception of rhythm.

On the latter point evidence is fairly conclusive. The polyphonic idiom, however strange it may sound to our ears, had been familiarised over a long period by its employment in public worship, and was handed on to the Reformed Church with such alteration as was necessary to the setting

of English as distinct from Latin words. Outside of the church folk-song still held its own ; but during the second half of the sixteenth century forces combined to make the contrapuntal style popular amongst educated Englishmen. The Renascence desire for accomplishments and graces, guided by the personal example of strong monarchs like Henry VIII and Elizabeth—both skilled musicians—established the practice of music as a fashionable recreation.

Prefaces to Elizabethan song-books have been quoted time and again to show the extent of the vogue, especially the passage from the *Plaine and Easie Introduction* in which Thomas Morley tells how the company marvelled when he confessed himself unable to read prick-song at sight : "Everie one began to wonder. Yea, some whispered to others, demaunding how I was brought up." Almost equally well-known is the remark, made by Nicholas Yonge in his *Musica Transalpina* (1588), that gentlemen and merchants were accustomed to meet at his house for the "exercise of Musicke daily." Mr. Frank Howes has shown that such evidence is not to be taken too seriously, for the prefaces were written to make people buy the books, and a certain amount of licence must be allowed to the advertiser. Yet the mere publication of those works proves the existence of a demand for part-songs and for simple instruction.

The descriptions mentioned serve to remind us also that those were the days of domestic music. Concerts, as we understand them, were unknown, and the executants with the exception of a few court musicians, were all amateurs. "Just as nowadays to be unable to take a hand at bridge is regarded in some circles as a sign of barbarian upbringing, so in the days of Elizabeth and James I, it was a social

solecism to sit out when the music books were brought to the table."[37] The popularity of this form of entertainment may be judged from the frequent references in Shakespeare and in contemporary literature generally, and from the fact that between 1588 and 1630 no fewer than ninety collections of songs were published in England. One does not suppose, however, that a court fashion, even when set by the king, spread to the lowest in the land.

Up to the year 1600 secular vocal music consisted chiefly of madrigals,—unbarred part-songs in the polyphonic manner. We can be fairly certain, therefore, that the poets and the audience for whom they wrote were familiar with rhythmic counterpoint, not as listeners merely, but as performers. Musical historians have already suggested that the separation of poetry and music which took place about this time gave rise to spoken metres like blank verse. I would go further: for if my analysis of the metre represents the facts, blank verse can be accurately described as a species of rhythmic counterpoint,—an ever-changing discant on a ground-bass—and its rise in the latter half of the sixteenth century is closely connected with the parallel development in music. The same principle underlies both forms, both reached maturity about the end of the century, and were overtaken by a period of steady decline. That the "ground-bass" of blank verse was a pattern foreign to English makes it all the more probable that the practical skill gained in music was carried over to poetry, and if further support be required for the view, this may be found in a closer study of the process of decay.

[37] *William Byrd*, by Frank Howes. (1928), p. 149. This work contains an excellent discussion of the evidence for "popularity," and a non-technical explanation of counterpoint.

§ 4

The rhythms of language and music, because they are manifestly different, are frequently considered to be hostile to each other : the history of prosody, however, seems to indicate that the association of music with verse tends to preserve metre. The ballad, for example, continued to flourish even in the barren years between Chaucer and Wyatt. Professor Saintsbury, though he does not mention the relationship of the two arts, notes that " the ballad-writers invariably, and the carol and hymn-writers very commonly, preserve the English licence of equivalence in the fullest fashion. . . They did a precious office in preserving the true principles of English prosody." And again, speaking of the early seventeenth century, he draws special attention to the fact that " lyric never broke down as couplet and blank verse were doing—that it always retained the tradition of metrical harmony which Wyatt and Surrey had reintroduced into English literary poetry, and which Spenser had perfected."[38] It is important to remember that the lyrics of the period were primarily intended to be sung : religious works and even long narrative poems were set to music. Speech-verses, on the other hand, and those lyrical metres which had severed their connection with song, very soon became unstable.

How does it happen that poets with excellent specimens before them lost the art of writing speech-verse ? And why did Lydgate and his contemporaries fail so lamentably in their efforts to reproduce fourteenth century metres ? The bare facts point to definite deterioration of the sense of rhythm. We know that there are great differences between individuals in this respect, but it is hardly credible

[38] *Historical Manual of English Prosody,* by George Saintsbury. (1910), pp. 164 and 189.

that over a considerable stretch of years English writers failed through lack of natural endowments. From our own experience we know also that skill, and above all skill in the *execution* of rhythmical movement, depends largely on the opportunity for practice, and so we are prompted to look round for some influence affecting the general standard of attainment.

Let us take the post-Elizabethan period first and assume for the moment that the practice afforded by music had some bearing on the rise of speech-verse. About the beginning of the seventeenth century the whole conception of musical form was changed by the introduction of what we call "harmony"—the homophonic as distinct from the polyphonic style. The vertical replaced the horizontal principle and people began to hear simultaneous sounds as chords, composite units, not constituent notes of separate melodies. A drastic simplification of rhythmical structure was the inevitable result. The listener's attention was fixed upon intervals of pitch : one part emerged as melody and its rhythm governed the whole composition. "Simultaneous combination of different metres" was no longer necessary, but to facilitate the performance of instrumental music bar-lines had to be introduced. Words and music were thus definitely separated : the time-element in the latter was finally rationalised, and since the new principle was difficult to handle at first, sequence-changes were avoided, with the result that the bar-system developed into a uniform series of homogeneous time-divisions. From this point of view harmony was the greatest enemy of rhythm, and what the music of later generations gained in emotional colouring it lost in subtle variety of movement.

To the student of literature it is of peculiar interest to note that the decline of polyphony coincides in time with

the decay of speech or "contrapuntal" verse. Can it be that the two processes are in some way related? When the madrigalian fashion gave way to a simpler style there was no longer the same need for proficiency in rhythmic substitution nor the same opportunity for exercising the talent. Skill was almost certain to diminish in consequence, especially if that skill was founded on sensation rather than perception.

Apart from rhythm there are other grounds for suggesting a close association between the two arts at this point in their history. The older music had been in the form of part-songs; counterpoint was "the logical vehicle for the expression of collective emotion." Now for the first time the solo began to appear as a serious rival. "Ayres" began to take the place of madrigals, partly because the new style gave prominence to a single line of melody and partly because of the growing desire for instrumental accompaniment. The lute, the favourite domestic instrument, lent itself to the production of separate chords, and its popularity led to an increased demand for vocal solos. Music, directed thus toward the expression of individual feeling, required appropriate words and from the pens of the Sucklings and Lovelaces came a flood of personal, very often "first-personal" lyrics.

To return to our main argument, we must note here that the change in poetic metres did not correspond exactly to the simplification of musical rhythm. On the contrary, speech-verse declined through excess of freedom. The natural tendency to elaborate the sensation was indulged at the expense of pattern. In contrapuntal music the necessity of keeping the parts together had acted as a restraining influence, but now that the ear was not asked to follow simultaneous rhythms the treatment of verse also became frankly "monodic." Liberty developed into licence

because there was nothing like harmony or ensemble performance to bring about rationalisation at this date. Blank verse decayed in much the same way as Old English metre, system and order being sacrificed to the desire for flexibility.

Changes of this kind, as one might expect, are not marked by any sudden revolution. Polyphonic music reappeared at intervals for the best part of a century; speech-verse was still in use and revived in a burst of sunset splendour with Milton, who, by the way, was a lover of music and the son of a musician of the old school. Had the metres simply gone out of fashion there would be no problem to discuss. It is the gradual disintegration of the patterns which strengthens my belief that the skill of the Elizabethans was mainly practical.

Metrical decay was more rapid in other periods and for different reasons. The literature of the fourteenth century for example, displays great ingenuity and variety in its verse-forms. A wave of poetic energy—especially technical energy—passes from the south at the beginning of the century to the north in the latter half and disappears suddenly as if it had never been. The metres employed, the interest shown in stanzaic pattern for its own sake, the rapid decay, all go to suggest that in this case skill was purely imitative. When the original English metre had run to seed—let us say roughly about the year 1100—a fresh impulse came from abroad. French and Italian models opened up a new range of possibilities and there followed a period of experiment in which native writers tried to produce in their own language something like the patterned rhythm, the "equal-beat measures" of the foreign models. A poem like the Pearl went far toward solving the difficulty but it remained for Chaucer to discover the secret of easy movement despite the

limitations imposed by the new forms. This was no matter of adopting French prosody merely: the metrical effect had to be reproduced in English, and success was the result of direct contact, so to speak. Such a triumph was short-lived. The Chaucerians copied their master more or less faithfully but the new measures had not yet been assimilated, had not passed into the general rhythmic consciousness. The technical brilliance of that age is, therefore, comparable with the first phase in the development of the sense of rhythm, with the period when the child's natural movements are modified by what he hears and sees around him. Of course I am far from suggesting that Chaucer himself, or any other poet, did not advance beyond that stage. My present concern is with the fact that the skill, however acquired, was lost rapidly and almost completely.

## § 5

In more recent times, from Coleridge onwards, such a state of affairs is scarcely possible. We have had good and bad poets, masters of metrical harmony and others not so great, but it is difficult to imagine a capable verse-writer failing to catch the base of any recognised metre, and this because of a vital change in the general attitude toward poetic form. The eighteenth century is the turning-point in the history of English prosody, for in one sense Pope and his contemporaries may be said to have discovered verse-pattern. Their special mission was to demonstrate that form had an intellectual as well as a sense-appeal; their aim was to compose verses, not for the ear alone, but in accordance with the laws of "numbers" as they understood them, and the critics who wrote on prosody saw to it that the general reader was educated up to the appreciation of this self-conscious art. Poets and scholars combined in

an attempt to rationalise metre just as musical time had been rationalised in the preceding century. The attempt itself was part of a wider movement, a tendency to submit all thought and conduct to the test of reason ; and so far as prosody is concerned its sincerity may be judged from the number of painstaking studies and the great interest shown in the theory of the subject during the age of Anne. The systematic study of English prosody begins after the year 1700.

As with the boy who discovers "pattern" for the first time, so here the result is an immediate simplification of rhythm, a return to forms which can be easily understood. Thus in spite of, and because of the attention given to prosody, the typical metres of the eighteenth century are more monotonous and more limited in range than those of earlier or later periods. It has been the custom—perhaps with critics more than with readers—to extol the metrical perfection of Heroic Couplet, and up to a point the praise is merited, for at best the form is capable of subtle effects. Yet as a metrical structure Heroic Couplet is not very highly developed ; pattern is much in evidence and not always sufficiently interesting to justify its prominence. The Augustans, whatever we may think of the quality of their poetry as a whole, exhibit none of that mastery over rhythm which we find in Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, and a host of later writers. The importance of the Classical School lies not so much in its practical achievement as in its influence on the conception of form.

The earlier poets prepared the way for Coleridge and his successors who carried the process a step further by applying the new conception to a wider range of patterns, and the later history of prosody is little more than the

account of how free movement and variety of rhythmical sensation were regained without sacrificing the intellectual appeal. Despite the external resemblance between the development of speech-verse in the nineteenth and seventeenth centuries, one is a process of growth, the other of disintegration, the difference being due to the survival in the later period of the rationalised base. Thus the moderns (if they use metre at all) still rely on the immediate perception of form but attempt structures far more varied, more complicated than those of the eighteenth century.

It may be that the process has already reached its utmost limit, for within the last few years poets and musicians have shown a tendency to revolt against rationalised form, to adopt non-metrical rhythms and depend on sensation alone. This may mean that the wheel has come full cycle, but if it is nothing more than a necessary readjustment of the balance,—body making its claim to a share of consideration with mind—then we see how rhythm, in the shape of jazz-music takes its revenge on harmony and how in free-verse natural speech-forms assert their independence of pattern. There are excesses in both arts, but we are still too close to the facts to estimate their real importance.

From all this it would appear that the history of rhythm is no mere enumeration of forms in chronological order. Underlying the changes of fashion there is discernible in English metre a continuous line of progression which in its general trend follows what I have called the individual cycle of growth. Equal-beat measures were first acquired by direct contact, passed through a long period of adaptation, were elaborated in practice, reduced to a rational system and further elaborated on that basis. Meanwhile racial rhythms, handed on with the language from one generation

to another, survived in normal speech and reappeared in the spoken line wherever free movement was possible.

A line of progression need not be interpreted to mean an unbroken advance at uniform speed : the balance tilts now on the side of order and again on the side of freedom. It would be easy, therefore, to find exceptions—Chaucer and Milton have already been mentioned—yet in spite of individual peculiarities and in spite of the many degrees of difficulty offered by the metres themselves, the evolution of verse-form appears as a major cycle reproducing on a large scale the phases of its minor developments.

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